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Wayfarers in Arcady

Charles Vince

GIFT OF
Dr. Benjamin Ide Wheeler

98
V767

WAYFARERS IN ARCADY

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[illegible]

CHARLES [illegible]

[illegible]

Happy is England! I could [illegible]
To see no other verdure than its own

— *Kee[illegible]*

G. P. PUTNAM'S [illegible]
NEW YORK AND [illegible]
The Knickerbocker [illegible]
1922

Furstenberg

WAYFARERS IN ARCADY

BY

CHARLES VINCE

AUTHOR OF "THE STRUT OF FACE"

Happy is England! I could be content
To see no other verdure than its own.

—*Keats.*

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1922

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by
Charles Vince

Made in the United States of America

To
MY FELLOW WAYFARER
OF THREE THOUSAND
MILES

524269

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WAYFARERS IN ARCADY

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WAYFARERS IN ARCADY

THE ROAD

WE have not travelled very far,
Nor ever have we gone
To where the great adventures are,
Nor Port Desire nor Calabar
Have we ever looked upon.

We go by the ploughed and tranquil field,
By the woods where no fears hide.
The forges are silent now in the weald
Where a man no more has need of a shield
Or a sword upon his side.

But we can feel the galloping wind
The quick cold strokes of the rain.
And it matters not that we must find,
Before the day is far behind,
A road to the London train.

For the sky that is high above Helicon
Is as high above Gomshall Down,
And a road is a road to travel on
Or whether it start from Babylon
Or out of Dorking town.

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THE TWO VALLEYS

OF the two valleys one was long and narrow, the other like half of a great bowl; and the second valley, since it looked towards the north-east while the long valley looked towards the north-west, was the first to be filled by the sunlight in the morning and by the shadows in the evening. They opened into the same field, and other fields stretched down from them to a farmhouse built of grey stone and flints, smooth and black as ice, with a ten-foot hedge of box round its garden, and a deep square porch of yew at its door.

Since they were valleys in the chalk hills they were of a beautiful shape, looking as though they had been very carefully made by eyes and hands that loved true and pure lines. From year's end to year's end their turf was always short and green, and they were unadorned, although in summer their green was faintly dusted over with the red gold and the pale gold of trefoil and rock roses.

To this cottage with the box hedge and the yew

porch came a young man, tired and troubled, and misanthropic. He may have been unhappy in love, or he may have been in debt, or he may have eaten and drunk too much, or, more probably, since he had come to such a place, he had worked too hard and slept too little. When he came away he had told his friends that he was going to spread his mind out in the open for the wind and the sun to freshen it again.

At the door he was received by the farmer's wife, a figure as square and deep as the porch itself, and led upstairs to a little room whose casement window, opening under the thatch, looked out across the fields to the two valleys. The passage outside was hung with wedding groups of the farmer's family and of the royal family in democratic neighbourliness, and in the room itself was one picture, so dark and dim that it looked as if it had been smoked. Peering close the young man could see a very large silver fish lying in the foreground of what might have been a landscape in the style of Poussin. The landlady considered it to have been sufficiently described when she had said with pride that it was "a painting in oils." The young man was about to make a joke about smoked fish and fish in oil, but reflecting that the landlady would probably

not understand it, he opened the window instead, and looked out across the fields to the two valleys.

At this window, with its broad wooden seat cut in the thickness of the wall, he was content to spend his days. At night his mind still worked, troubled and overstrained, and he woke out of puzzled uneasy dreams of which he remembered only that he had been trying to get something to come right and always it went wrong; but his days were like long sweet sleep. Kneeling on that wooden seat and leaning from the window, where his outstretched hand could touch the thatch above and the living roof of the old yew porch below, he let his mind sink into idleness, luxuriously, as the tired body will sink into cool water. He sank to that depth where the mind is back again in its first childhood, content for hours with no more than a moving thing. So he was happy, watching the smoke of his pipe as it curled up into the thatch, or the top of an apple tree as it moved in the wind, or the rain as it fell through the still summer air, or the shadow of the tall box hedge at evening as it crept across the garden like a tide. And if there were neither rain nor shadow nor wind to watch, then he looked across the fields at the two valleys, and was content with their emptiness.

He had watched them for a long time before he even thought—so idle was he—of going any nearer to them. Then one day he walked across the fields and climbed the hill in which they lay, listening to the pleasant sound of the grass heads as they tapped on his boots, and looking at the simple and pure shape of the two valleys. After that he left his window under the thatch and spent his days lying on the odorous ages-old turf of the chalk which is more restful than down and all the "verdurous glooms." There, through half-closed eyes, he looked out, as he thought, at nothing, and thanked God for the emptiness of the two valleys, where none came and nothing had ever happened.

To him, drowsing there, sleep and waking were almost the same, for each was a great peace, born of the strength and gentleness of that ancient turf on which he lay. Time was not. Nothing in those valleys can ever have been other than it was. There was nothing—nothing as he looked round them, which could tell him whether he was in the present or the past, and he would wake (this was after he had listened to stories in the farm kitchen) wondering in what century he was, and look, still half asleep, for the deer stealers coming across the hill from the chase beyond,

or listen for the sound of the mallets of the Norman stonemasons building the church in the little village across the hill. And once he wondered if he heard, very faintly, the cries of men and women on the curving Down behind him as they watched the handfuls of the ashes of their dead laid on the dry chalk, and the black earthen pans placed over them and the great barrows, less ancient only than the hills, heaped above. So he dreamed in that empty place until one day he noticed in the turf a track, no broader than a cart wheel, and faintly white with chalk. He had lain close by it for a long time, not moving, and wondering what it could be, when suddenly a rabbit dashed down it from behind him and he saw its scut go over the valley's rim like a shooting star.

For the first time, he wakened to the living things in those two valleys. He would lie very still to watch the rabbits travelling up and down by those little roads that their feet had whitened, or playing tick down below, or coming out to sit in the sunlight as the shadow began to creep over the valley's rim. As his eyes opened, the emptiness of the two valleys, for which he had blessed them, began to fill with living things. He watched each day for a flock of sheep that came

always by the same road—he had seen them before, unthinking as he had seen the flowers or the clouds—and drifted up through the valleys, silent as the blowing rain. He would listen now for the shepherd's voice coming across to him high and strange as the call of a bird, and watch for his dog that moved among the sheep like a bird's shadow on the turf.

Each day he would see them stop in their wandering on the side of the long valley, and pour suddenly down into it, gathering eagerly round a small hut. Then they would drift away again, and when he went across to see why it was that they gathered there, he found drinking troughs round the hut and inside it a well.

It was then that he saw the horseman. He too had his hour each day. He would come, riding slowly across the fields from the distant farm, and sit on a trough while the horse, tramping round and round, would pump the water up from the depths below the chalk.

Last of all came the cows, and their hour was when the day began to turn, and the valleys seemed to ripen, growing golden and mellow in the sun; and the rim of the rounded valley was marked with a foot of dark shadow, like the painting round the rim of a bowl.

The cows would come in single file from the fields—each falling into place as the file went by in slow procession to the well. It was like a solemn ceremony at the close of day—the procession of the evensong of the two valleys. So the noiseless coming and going of the day was ended, and the rounded valley began to fill with shadows.

All this the young man watched and was fascinated, as a child watches the turn and return of the wheel of a watch. Each day it happened just the same. The creatures came and went, unheeding of time but at their appointed hours. They came also by their own paths that they had made themselves. Those empty valleys were more full of roads than the busiest of towns—roads made and kept by the continual passing of many feet. Their floors were all criss-crossed by the little white ways of the rabbits. Their sides were closely ribbed with hundreds of earth tracks studded with flints, which the feet of the sheep had beaten out of the turf. These tracks ran all round the valleys like the seats in an immense amphitheatre, so clearly and evenly were they made; and twisting leisurely across the fields was the broader highway of earth, worn out of the turf, by which the cows came to drink.

Watching these roads, and wondering how much older they must be than the streets of the towns that he knew, watching them and the creatures that came by them, regular as the sun, in their uncrowded, unhurrying life, the young man forgot that desire for escape and for loneliness with which he had come, and was happy again with the present and the companionship of living things.

On his last day he sat above the rounded valley until he saw the horseman appear across the fields. Then he walked down to the well and when the horseman came asked that he might be allowed to pump up the water that day. At this the horseman neither smiled nor looked surprised but nodded and sat his horse, while the young man laid his strength against the long pole. He pushed it round, slowly and laboriously, and did not stop until he heard the first of the water begin to flow into the troughs. Then, as the horse was fastened to the pole to finish the work, he climbed the valley's side, and taking one of the hundreds of little sheep paths, and treading carefully in its narrow way, he went by it right round the two valleys and the curve of hillside which separated them, until he came to a rabbit track, and following this went up over the valley's rim

to the place where he used to sit. All this he did as a man performing a ceremony, and then, feeling that by this act he had made himself a part of the valley's life, since he had shared for a moment in its toil, he went back by his accustomed way to the farmhouse, where his bag stood, ready packed, under the great porch of yew.

ON COMING TO THE DOWNS

EVERY time that a man who loves the hills returns to them, he feels as if, for him, a miracle had been performed. Far away he has seen a strange look in the high clouds, and then, suddenly, he has known that the hills were there; but just when that change came and how he first knew the hills from the clouds he can never be sure. In this way, for every traveller who returns to them, the hills are made afresh out of the sky. In whatever way he may come, there will always be that mysterious moment of their change, or, as it more truly seems to him, of their birth.

But you do not come to the South Downs as you come to other hills. They do not grow out of the clouds, but rise up before you above the curve of the world. And yet, although they are always part of this earth, they are more distant, mysterious, and aloof than any of the other hills. They have no high peaks, nor fantastic shapes. They have nothing but their long unwavering line standing against the sky, like the unattain-

able horizon of the sea. It is this that makes them more remote than all the hills, and you draw near to them wondering always what it can be that lies beyond. They stand, as sometimes the sea stands, like a great green wall of the Gods built to keep men from things too good for them to find, and the little chalk roads that go up them are like tall and slender ladders, from which a man, if he ever climbed them, would step straight into the sky.

In another thing also the Downs are different from the hills. They do not change. For the unchanging hills do, indeed, change continually. You have seen them in the sunshine looking small and dusty and far away; and after rain, tall and black and very near. You have seen them towering, awesome and beautiful, against a clear evening sky, and the next day dim with wrack and dwarfed by the great moving mountains of the clouds that roll above them. For the faces and the very stature of the hills change and change again with the changes of the sky. But the Downs do not change. There is something in their pure and beautiful shape which is stronger than any storms and than all the moods of the sky. Night and the clouds alike rest very gently on them. They have a sweetness and gravity of

their own which Nature herself cannot alter. The skies and the seas, the trees and the hills—all these she can make to reflect all her moods. But however her face may change above the Downs they remain always the same. They do indeed respond to those two needs which a man feels more and more strongly the older he grows. They are simple and they are sure.

In his description of Egdon Moor Mr. Hardy speaks of a change in the human mind towards Nature. He believes that it grows darker in itself, and, seeking always for sympathy in Nature to its own moods, that it turns more and more towards what is most sombre and most bleak in her. He believes that in the end we shall have grown as indifferent to the groves and the valleys, to

> Daffodils
> With the green world they live in; and clear rills
> That for themselves a cooling covert make,
> 'Gainst the hot season, the mid-forest brake
> Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms,

—as indifferent to these as were the earlier generations to the beauty of the hills. But that time will never come so long as there are men who try, in whatever way is given them, to praise the Sussex Downs. No man could love them and not keep in himself some sweetness and sanity and a

belief in gracious things. In them these antagonisms, that elsewhere divide the world, have no existence. One cannot understand, when among them, why some men should love the valleys and some the hills, for on their heights the valleys and the hills meet. There are no sheltered and tended gardens in all England where the flowers bloom as they bloom on this open turf, fed by the south-west wind and the salt sea-mists. They are sown as close with the pale rock-roses as is the sky with stars, and their poppy fields are like flame and their great gorse slopes like golden light across the miles. And where these flowers bloom, and where the plough turns the earth and the corn is sown, and the road runs and the sheep feed, among all these things that belong to the quiet and sheltered places of the earth, there is also such a sense of spacious emptiness, inhabited only by the light and the wind, as one will not find on the highest hills, but only in the sky.

Here too in that mysterious time between day and night other things meet also which elsewhere must always be divided. In that waning light one may wonder whether they are indeed of the earth, and do not belong also to the sea and the sky; for all that is beautiful and serene in all three

seems to meet and be made permanent in the Downs, the expanse of the sea, and the gracious shapes of the earth, and the purity of the sky.

I could believe that the Downs were made after the sky, in the early morning of the third day of the world, and are a little older than all the rest of the earth. When the waters were divided and the sky made between, a strange sea hung beneath, and when the waters were gathered into one place that the dry land might appear, this sea was changed suddenly into land and its waves were caught and changed to earth before they could break. But even now it half belongs to the sky and the sea, and some day its great serene spaces will be lifted to the sky again, and its crested slopes of turf will break into water, and its white stones turn to foam.

This sense of strange things meeting there, which everywhere else are kept apart, haunts all the verse that men have written about the Downs; but no one yet has found the words to say what it is. One poet tried when he said very bluntly of them that they were

> Half wild and wholly tame,

and another when he wrote,—

> Together stand
> Tillage and pasture and dim fairyland,

and yet another when he wrote,—

> They are a wonderland, where shapes well-known,
> Hayrick or homestead, bush or tree-top, seen
> Far off, take forms of faerie not their own.

But no one has ever said what it really is, or indeed come nearer to saying it than a broad rough gesture, which is all that those words are. Indeed the wisest poet was he who did not attempt to say more than could be said in very plain and simple words, and who wrote,—

> And along the sky the line of the Downs
> So noble and so bare.

For it is so that you remember them, as something single, and complete, and very clear. It is because they have this simplicity, and their changeless look, and that far, remote line of their summit like the horizon against the sky, that they stand apart from all other hills and seem more steadfast than them all. Whatever else of beauty and mystery you have found in them, you see them always in your mind as you saw them when you first came to them, rising in their long green rampart from the weald, and shutting away behind them many things. For the mys-

tery of the hills as you come to them, watching them take birth from the clouds, is the mystery of what they are; but the mystery of the Downs is the mystery of what they hide.

THE SEAFARER OF THE DOWNS

I MET the Sea Captain for the first time one evening after a day of storm when the wind was blowing down the gap and out to sea. The water in the last grey reaches of the river was ruffled and broken between the wind and the incoming tide, and on the cliffs, on either side of the gap, you could hear, if you lay close in the turf, the cheerful song that the wind made, blowing through the fine grasses, and watch the seagulls as they rose from the crumbling cliff edge and were carried away like spindrift from a wave.

The path to the top of the headland went upwards through a valley behind the crest of the cliffs, and was so smooth and so green that it was like a great hollow of water between two waves. It was empty except for a clump of bugloss turning wine dark in the late summer, and the chalk stones, like patches of foam, all up the valley marking the path.

A little way up I could see what looked like a

much larger stone than any of the rest, but when I came to it I found a sheep lying on its back. It was lying very still, and its four legs were sticking straight up into the air so that it looked like a great wooden toy of a sheep, and no one would have been surprised to see a little wheel at the end of each of its feet.

As I stood by it I saw a man coming down from the headland. He wore a big cloak, and I thought it must be the shepherd, although he carried no crook and he did not walk as the shepherds do. I waited, and together we helped the sheep to its feet again. Then I looked at him. It was a shepherd's cloak that he had, and above it a sailor's sou'-wester. The two together, at first sight, gave him a comical air, but this one forgot when one knew him, and now I feel that this mixed dress, which he wore in all seasons, was exactly right for that strange, pathetic man.

He told me the best way to help up sheep who have rolled on their backs, and talked of the staggers, and then he looked through the end of the valley out to sea. A steamer was on her way across to France, with her smoke rolling far ahead over the waters before that dancing north wind. Far beyond the smoke we could see a great sailing

ship going down Channel along the distant road of the horizon, and nearer at hand was a smaller ship making up the coast. The man looked at her for some time and said, in a changed, sharp voice, that she was carrying too much sail.

I turned then to leave him, looking up at the great curve of turf above us which, in that amber-coloured evening light after the rain, had become a deeper and almost lucent green.

"It's like a wave," I said.

"It's like a wave," he repeated. "It hasn't started to break yet—but perhaps one day it will."

These were our last words. He went down the valley, and I went up and over the headland, thinking of this odd man, and the sudden change in his voice when he spoke of the ship, and then the note that was almost fear, when he said of that great wave of turf that some day it might break.

Everyone in the village called him the Sea Captain, and told me of his cleverness with animals and especially with sheep, which was well known, so that the shepherds themselves would seek his advice. But when I asked of his adventures at sea they said no more than that he was the Sea Captain.

I wondered what tales he would tell of the sea, but he told none. And yet the sea was always coming into his talk, and seemed never out of his mind. He told me no tales—and then, one night, as we went down towards the sea by a road, all roofed and dark with trees, that once upon a time the smugglers used, he told me of a storm when one of the hands fell from aloft, crashing with his face on the deck, and was picked up with his jaw broken, and hanging horribly loose on his throat. Perhaps it was the night and that dark road, and the sound of the sea on the shingle as we came near it, like mournful fingers raking among the stones for something that they had lost—perhaps it was these which gave to the tale a moving and terrible reality, as he described the look of horror in the man's eyes, and the awful noises that he made out of his hanging mouth, like a sheep in pain. That was his only tale, but it was like all his talk of the sea, through which there seemed to run, in spite of him, an odd current of fear.

What the fear was I could not tell, but I came very soon to the conclusion that he must have left the sea for some fault of his own, and that this had made bitter all his memories.

It was only when his talk of the sea mixed

with his talk of the land that it lost all fear. He talked as a lover of the Downs, with a love of the sea running through it all. He talked of them when the grey showers blew across them, and they themselves were like a rolling swell after a storm and of their great, grey untroubled emptiness in the evening like a sea where no ship came, when one walked by the little white stones that marked the path, and looked out to the Channel for the friendly lights of the fishing fleet, gathered together like the lights of a town.

He talked of the trees that filled the gap, shutting off his village from the sea, and of the trees round his home when he was a boy—he had come from inland; and he would tell how he had listened to them at night, pretending that the wind in them was the sound of the sea, and wondering when the call would come for him to go on deck. "And now when I hear it," he said, "I listen differently. I seem to hear it come howling over the awful empty sea, and then the wind falls a little and the emptiness all fills with the sound of the leaves."

In this way he talked, this man whom something at sea troubled, so that at times he seemed to fear it like a child; but whether or not he would have been happy if he had left it altogether

going back to his own inland country, I could not be sure.

One day the news came that he was dead, and that if I would go down to his cottage there were messages which he had left for me. I went, and found that he had been ill only two days. Before he died he had said that he left his sea books to me, begging that I would have "Sea Captain" put on his tomb.

There were only three or four books in his cottage, and they stood on a shelf in the kitchen with the candlesticks. I lifted them down, expecting to find his Nautical Almanack and Sailing Directions and his List of Lights and Tide Tables. Instead, to my surprise, I found that they were all volumes of Marryat, much mended and soiled, and their woodcuts coloured roughly with chalk—the tales of the sea that boys read fifty years ago. And that was all.

With the books in my hands, and a first understanding of the mystery of the Sea Captain in my mind, I went up to the Vicarage. There I found a woman with the Vicar, "the Captain's sister," he said, and added "not that he was a Captain at all."

"Nor had ever been to sea"—the woman spoke

as if she were ashamed, "though he was always romancing about it."

I put the books down on the table before her. She looked at them and went on.

"And he was mad to go to sea until—" she broke off, "and then he gave it up. But even then he said that he must be near the sea. I've hardly seen him for forty years. He might have had the farm—a good farm, and we're well to do"—she looked at us a little defiantly—"but he would come to the sea."

I said nothing, for I was looking at the books and wondering. It might be in one of them, but I doubted it.

"Did he ever tell you," I looked at the Vicar, "the tale of a storm when a man fell on deck and broke his jaw?"

The Vicar shook his head, but the woman gave a start.

"Broke his jaw?" she said.

"Yes," said I; "so that it was hanging horribly down, and he was moaning like a sheep."

"And he said that that happened on a ship?" She spoke almost with awe. "To think that he remembered it at all! He can't have been more than ten at the time. It was one of our farm hands. He fell off the roof of the

barn. To think that he said it happened on a ship!"

"I am afraid it must have been deliberate deceit." The Vicar was evidently pained—but then he had not heard the tale.

I said nothing, remembering how the Sea Captain had told it on that dark road under the trees, to the sound of the mournful sea, as it crept and whispered among the stones.

When the sister went away she took with her such things as the Sea Captain had left, but the books she said that I might keep. There were many things that she had not said, and that we had not liked to ask. Others had asked them, for the day after she had gone the village was full of vague tales. Yet she can have answered little or nothing. The tales were too vague. All we knew was that something had changed the Sea Captain when he was still a boy, turning his delight at the sea to fear, so that the sea had haunted him all his life, chaining him to her yet always repulsing him.

After his burial the village was bitterly divided. Some would have had "Sea Captain" put on his tombstone, as he had desired. The others held that to set up such a lie on holy ground would be blasphemy. It was useless to

argue that the very last man laid in that churchyard, though he had been a lazy drunkard, neglecting his wife and indifferent to his children, yet was described on his grave as a tender husband and devoted father. It was useless to argue, for the Vicar was on the side of those who were for the exact truth.

But if the Sea Captain's spirit shall ever visit that place again, may he be satisfied to find, beneath his name and the date of his death,

> This soul hath been
> Alone, on a wide, wide sea.

THE OLD MAN AND DEATH

ONE summer day, during the War, I walked through a Sussex village under the Downs, a village so undisturbed and serene that it seemed as if the hot breath of War can never have blown that way. I walked through it, counting the coloured cards in the cottage windows with the names of those who had gone to the War; and I wondered if there were any people left in it, for the place was so still and empty, and so many had gone.

The wind was in the east, and, very faintly, it brought the sound of guns from the Flemish coast. There in the weald, the sound did not seem to come out of the air at all, but from beneath the Downs. It was like a murmur deep within the earth, as if the dead, lying under their barrows and the trenches of their ancient camps, had turned and muttered in their sleep.

I followed the road through the village, and up the hill behind it, and sitting there at the top looked back across the quiet roofs to the Downs.

Then I saw that an old man had been climbing the hill behind me. He stopped two yards away and bent down. A rabbit lay on the road close under the edge of the grass; it had been killed and ripped open by a stoat. The old man picked it up and parting the grasses at the hedge roots slipped it in among them. He looked up and saw me watching him.

"It'll be very well there," he said. "If I was a rabbit I'd rather lie there and feed that rose than at the bottom of one of their profitless sand-holes. But they will go to their holes if they can."

He sat down near me and filled a pipe so that I had time to look at his face, a cheerful, strong face, well browned and wrinkled with the weather, a face, you could see, that took pleasure in feeling the wind and the rain.

"There's a woman down there," he went on "(you could see her chimney if it wasn't for the church spire) who has just lost her son. I went in last night to say a word or two. 'Ah,' she said to me, 'if only I had him here and could put him in the churchyard, where his father is, and know he was safe there, I'd be comforted. It's not knowing where he lies that's hard.' 'What matter?' said I; 'so long as there's good earth

round him he'll be easy. I've seen life and death in these fields and woods enough years now to know as it don't matter very much where you lie so long as you're in good earth.' But there was no comfort in it to her. She would ha' been happier if she had seen him brought home to the churchyard. It's that that hurts them all."

The old man puffed at his pipe for a while. "That's not my way of thinking," he said, and pointed down the hill. "There's my cottage, with the bent chimney and the honeysuckle round it. It's just flowering again. From the door you can see up this hill. The station is over the other side behind us.

"It's three years and more now since my son went up this hill. He didn't say much, but we knew why he was going. When he came back he was a soldier. He came and went more than once. We never knew when he was coming. The last time he came from France. One night very late—it must ha' been long after ten—he knocked us up. There he was, loaded like a pedlar, and as muddy as if he had just come from the plough. When he went away it made the sixth time that I had watched him up this hill. It's just where we are now that he would turn and wave at us."

The old man looked at me, and neither in his eyes or voice was any sadness. He spoke gravely; that was all.

"His mother is like the rest," he said; "she misses it that she didn't see him at the end lying on the bed where he was born. She misses the comfort of his grave to grieve over. But I like it better as it is. I feel the sudden end of it less. He just went away.

"When he comes into the talk I don't hush my voice and stop. I talk of him just the same as before, and tell the tales that he used to tell when he came home, and laugh over them.

"It shocks some of them. They think I've no heart because they don't see me grieve. But there's no comfort to me in grieving, as there is to some. He just went away as he had gone before, and I like to think that he can still come back.

"The Vicar says I should be comforted, remembering that he did his duty and that now he's in heaven. But *I* say that I'd rather think that he's still somewhere on earth, and that one day yet he'll come walking over this hill again."

The old man looked at me and smiled. Then he got to his feet, and I with him; and we walked together just across the crest of the hill. Away

below it the white smoke of a train was moving above the hedges, and when it stopped I could see the red station among the trees. We watched long after the train had gone, for we could see the little dark figures of people come out of the station and move along a few yards of white road before the hedges hid them. We watched until they had all disappeared, until it was certain that there were no more to come. Then, very slowly, the old man knocked out his pipe in the palm of his hand, and turning, went back down the hill.

SHEPHERDS' ROMANCE

I heard a mess of merry Shepherds Sing
A joyful song full of sweet delight.

SHEPHERDS changed when they laid aside their pipes. Neither Theocritus nor the writers of the Mediæval and Elizabethan Carols would have understood Professor Jacks's Mad Shepherds. To them the shepherds were the merriest of men, but to us, now that they have ceased to sing, they are of all men the most mysterious. We wonder how they fill their silences. As they stand along the edges of the hills, bent a little over their crooks, they are like great solitary birds. Nor do they even walk like other men. They walk as if they were meant always to be still, like statues just come to life and moving for the first time their joints of stone, or like trees feeling their way with their great roots. Do they wait like animals in vacant content? Or do they dream? Of this world, at least, they know things that we cannot. Perhaps they are the richer men for having now no

pipes to play, and for standing in silence all day on the hills.

But this shepherd, had he lived in the piping times, had piped as merrily as any of them.

> He had on him his tabard and his hat,
> His tar box, his pipe and his flagat;
> His name was called jolly, jolly Wat.

He too, had he lived in other times, had been a jolly, jolly Wat.

He was a small man and, although it was a warm summer day, he wore a massive overcoat that almost touched the ground. He stooped a little, and it seemed as if his shoulders bent beneath its weight. He had a plain, gentle, and wooden face that did not change. But his eyes, which were a very pale clear blue, were alive as he talked, and by them one knew when he was laughing. He had also two small tobacco pipes, —very small for a man to smoke in the open air. They were both old and black, one of clay and one of briar, and he filled and smoked them alternately.

He talked like other men, boasting in a gentle and charming way of his possessions and the things that he did. He talked of his great coat which he had bought marvellously cheap and

which no rain could penetrate. He told us how he had painted it with rubber and, pegging it out one night, had filled it with water; yet in the morning it was dry as a rush beneath. He talked of his employers, telling us how they were wrong about the sheep and he was right, and of the dogs he had bred and the marvellous things that they did, and of his sheep, and an illness that they had had, wasting away, as he said, like butter against the sun. So he talked with his gentle wooden face, in the same way that other men talk of themselves when they love their work, except that he spoke without vain glory and without bitterness even towards his employers and their mistakes. In all he said there was the sweetness of the open air. He talked; but we had not yet touched on the thing that piped in his soul.

We made ready to leave him, pointing out our way along the Downs to a distant hill where stood a solitary and withered thorn which was called "the Scrag." In reply he asked us (filling this time the briar) if we knew Cunning Dick's hole, which, not long since, had been discovered in the side of the hill with the table and chair still in it that Dick had used. And when we asked him who was Dick his eyes showed his surprise, and he answered that it was Dick Turpin, who

had worked in those parts. Then he turned and pointed across to the next ridge of the Downs where once the main road had run along the summit—a road still broad and level but now green with turf. He pointed to a wood, and, speaking as a man speaks who had made great discoveries, he said that he knew, over there in that wood, of another of Cunning Dick's holes. The hole itself he had never been able to find, but his brother one day had seen, stuck in the trunk of a tree, the staple to which Dick must have tied his horse; and he himself had drawn that staple out. He had it still. And then . . . "I've read two hundred of Cunning Dick's books," he said.

We had been growing a little weary of his gentle, ambling garrulity, but at this we stopped. We had come suddenly on a great belief, and we looked at him in surprise and even in reverence. He talked on of Dick's adventures, the eyes, in his kindly wooden face, full of excitement, and as he talked we could see him as he must often be, sitting by some cottage fire in winter evenings, and reading those little paper-bound books, each with its "two-penny coloured" cover of a highwayman—reading them with the simple, complete faith of a child.

It was not in Dick and his adventures that we were interested, but in this romantic shepherd. He was touched with that splendid madness which compels some men to turn their fellows into gods. Had he lived in a town and among books instead of with his sheep in the sweet, sane air of the Downs, he might have been one of those strange conspirators who find the hidden hand of Bacon in every Elizabethan writer, and turn the joyous, full-hearted literature of all that age into a vast inhuman mystery. Instead he believed, with a faith which could harm none, that everything which he had read of Dick Turpin had been written with Dick's own hand.

He had passed the age at which every reader of fairy tales and adventure asks the question which proclaims him mortal, doomed to doubt and change—the question, "Did it really happen?" He had passed it with his faith undimmed. He had missed the first turning point of mortal men, and gone on by his own road.

He knew that Dick was dead. He knew that he would never see him come galloping across the Downs, nor did he peer in at his Cunning Hole expecting to find him at his table. Yet he had, not knowing it, made Dick immortal. Another hundred books of Dick's adventures

may yet be written, and he will receive them all, in pure and simple faith, as from Dick's own hand. He may never find that Cunning Hole for which he seeks, but there are great discoveries still for him to make. For surely some day the "penny dreadful" will grow weary of modern times and the discovery of crime, and the adoration of great detectives. It will return again to the past, to the highroad and horsemen, to genial rogues and picaresque romance. Then will he be happy.

He plays no pipe on the Downs, and sings no songs, but he is of the company of Merry Shepherds. For as he goes his slow way behind his sheep, sweeping the grass heads with his coat, or stands and looks across the valley at the wood where the Cunning Hole lies hid, what a great figure of a horseman gallops always down the romantic high-road of his soul.

GREAT ROADS

OF all the things that man has ever made the roads are the greatest of his works of unconscious art. You cannot imagine the most contemptible of æsthetes having a road made that through his window he might admire the grace with which it turned a corner; and you may be sure of this, that if he did it would be a vain thing, and that the road, since it was not made to travel by, would not be worth looking at. Men have never made a road except for the good reason that they wanted very much to reach some place; and in doing it they have always shown themselves indifferent to beautiful things. They break the hills; they ruin the streams. They go on their way caring for nothing but their intent to arrive, and yet, not knowing what they do, they make the roads also beautiful and mysterious, with a beauty and mystery which endure long after their purpose has been fulfilled, and which become a part of the very magic of the earth.

Wherever the great roads pass they bring three noble things. They bring memory. When the Romans built a road for many miles along that high and level summit which is still called High Street, they did it only because they thought that so they could most easily take their legions from Windermere to Penrith. That road was long since overgrown with the old turf of the hills, and we go northwards now by other ways. But beneath the turf the road remains, a road travelling no longer to Penrith but back into the years. It serves no purpose now, but it remains, ennobling the hills. To them the changing and returning seasons cannot bring forgetfulness. There is this road within their turf keeping the past alive. For this also one can say of the roads that cannot be said of any other of the works of men. They may be forgotten but, so long as they are remembered, they cannot altogether die. Cities that have fallen into ruins are more desolate than emptiness. The flowers and the grasses have come up like hands out of the earth to draw them back to it. No one will ever live in them again. Imagination itself can hardly rebuild them, or believe that men ever called them home. But where roads have been—even though they are covered with the turf, and the wild things

have returned to live in them—there men can still walk.

The second good thing that the great roads bring is this, that they give to all the country which they cross an emphasis and firmness to whatever is beautiful in its shape. They make the plains more level; they mark, so that the eye can see it more clearly, the beautiful dip and wave of the land at the foot of the hills; they make magnificent the great curve of a hillside. As they can ennoble an empty place with memory so also can they give grandeur to its very shape. It is so with those great roads of Northern France that go rising and falling, rising and falling, across the arches of the Downs. Where those unswerving roads touch that smoothly rolling country with its even and gentle curves, it is suddenly changed. They seem to increase its very stature, to exalt it.

Last of all the great roads bring romance. Not the eye only but the mind travels by them, imagining many things. Never does it go so far into the distant mists as when it follows the way of the white roads. This is their final paradox and mystery. One knows that it is by following them and not by turning aside that one will reach the undiscovered places.

What it is that gives to certain roads this enchantment no one can tell. Some have it and some have it not, and some may have it in one place and not another, and some may have it only at certain times. One cannot explain it. You can only say that of such a road you know at once that it will take you to some place where you wish very much to be. By this you know these roads, and it is the only thing really worth having in a road, and these are the only roads worth travelling by.

No one has yet written a book about the influence of the roads on the characters of the nations who make them, or, if you prefer it, about the way in which the characters of nations are made clear by their roads. One could write the book from either starting point, and from each it would be true. For we show what we are by what we make, and the things once made, completed and not to be changed, are a perpetual influence upon us. The history of Europe could be told in such a book; and it would have a very beautiful chapter entitled "The Part Played by Hedges in the Development of the English Character."

The whole difference between the English and French peoples is in their roads. Each started

with the roads that the Romans left them, and France still travels by those roads; but in England men now search for them under the turf of the Downs and trace across the fields the way that they must have taken. The faith of the French mind in reason; its courage in following ideas direct to their conclusion; its economy; its love of light, and of good proportion, and of the classic in beauty—all these things are expressed by those great roads laid like a sword across the country, unswerving, unhedged, open to the sun, with their poplars kept spare and lean by the winds. All noble things the French roads have but one—they are without enchantment. They are too straight and too confident. They lead only to that place whose name is on the map.

All that the French roads are the English roads are not. They wander. They go, so many of them, between great flowering, wasteful, beautiful hedges; and the trees rise out of the hedges, stretching magnificent arms from that pleasant shelter in which they live, massive and luxuriant, as if all the richness of the earth were only to give them stature and beauty. Those roadside trees, and the unclipped hedges full of birds, and the broad grass banks, and the ditches that are wayside gardens of wild flowers, what

else could speak more clearly than they of the easy, wasteful, jolly contentment of the English? Seeing these roads any foreigner might say that indeed they could belong only to the people who use so much that word which he cannot translate—"comfortable." Walking by them also as they wind and wander, seeming not to know what way they will go, yet all the time following the curves and slopes of the earth, until in some mysterious easy way of their own they do at last reach the place—walking by them so, he might also come to understand that thing of which he is most impatient, suspicious and resentful, that strange sense by which, blundering on without any light of reason, the English, in the end, arrive.

Above all, if he followed the English roads, by wayside hedge and elm and oak and beech, by all their flowering, comfortable, pleasant windings, until suddenly they lifted him out and up to the open turf of moor or hill or Down, not like those French roads pointing straight as a sign-post to the next town, but still wandering—as if they searched for something—over the hills and into the sky—then at last perhaps he would understand the final and greatest puzzle of the English: why it is that out of this people, not caring much

for thought, loving ease and comfort, out of this people, as he thinks them, of over-prosperous tradesmen, so many poets have come and have travelled on to such strange cities and lands and fairy places, as no straight road has ever reached.

These things and many more a man might learn from the great roads, but they stand also as a symbol of something greater even than the soul of a people. They are the splendid symbol of all noble art, the symbol of the truth that men only achieve beautiful and enduring works when they are not concerned alone with the beauty of what they do, but are intent also on reaching something, even though it is no more than an understanding of what is in their own minds.

THE SCHOLAR ROADMAKER

HE was killed by a wandering bullet when working on a road behind the lines, and these are passages from some of his letters. He wrote a great deal, for though he had good comrades in his Labour Battalion, there were none to whom he could talk very much, and so he was always writing for the comfort and pleasure of his own mind. It left him content in the monotony of a labour that had none of the fierce moments of a soldier's life, though it brought him a soldier's death.

His letters were written in all sorts of odd places, whenever the fancy took him and he had five minutes leisure, by the light of a candle stump as he sprawled on the floor of his billet, or as he lay at the road-side resting; and he spoke of them always as his "raw stuff," that some day he would use. They are full of cheerful talk about all the books that he would write after the war, but most of all about his book on roads. And now that wandering bullet has brought him

and them to the dust, and there remains nothing of it all but a grave in France and a box full of "raw stuff" and eager hope.

. . . . . .

"I seem now to have been busy all my life with roads. There was a bit of road that I used to love when I was a boy. It was across the valley from my home. One end of it rose out of the woods, and the other went over the edge of the hill. I used to play with that bit of road; I used to play at sending people up and down it. Once you sent them over you never knew just how they would come back, or what they would bring. It was this that made it a fine game, a game of unending fancies. I often think of it as I bend over these roads.

"And I often remember how the news of the war first came to me. I was in the north of England that August, tramping along the crest of the hills that are still called High Street, after the road which the Romans built there. In the late twilight I came down to an inn at the head of a lake. I had been thinking of the Roman legionaries who once upon a time went that way, and feeling the utter freedom and peace of it all. For I was alone all day with the turf and the wind

and the white sign-posts, that up there on the top of the hills seemed to point to no places on earth but to some distant places of the sky. In the inn I picked up a paper two days old and read the declaration of war.

"There was destiny in it when they made me a roadmaker.

. . . . . .

"When I am cheerful I dream of writing the greatest book on roads that was ever written. For I have done more than tramp the roads and love them. I have worked on them and ached for them. I shall go to Rome where all the great roads start; and I shall write of it all in a house that I see (though it is still unbuilt) just under the edge of the North Downs where the oldest road in England runs. That is how I dream when I am cheerful; and when I am sad I think that I shall die on one of these roads and drop into a shell hole.

. . . . . .

"We work too hard in the open air to dream at night. When I lie down I tumble straight into deep sleep. But sometimes I have a half dream in the mornings, before I am fully awake. It is

a dream always of the road that, at the moment, we are making across this shell-broken, pitiful country; but always as I go along it it becomes that white road over the hill that I knew when I was a boy. I know that they are the same roads but I never see where they join. There is always a bit of dead ground between them, and I always wake before I come to it. But beyond I see the old road very clear, going over the hill.

. . . . . .

"I had rather a success with the battalion the other night. We were back in camp. It had been a day of continual rain, awful to work in, and there had been fairly heavy shelling that had cut up our work. We were sodden and discontented and cursed roads and roadmaking and prayed to be in the trenches, and sneered at ourselves because we were not real soldiers. It was then that I broke in and told them of the Roman roads, and what awful labour they were to make, built in stone across the hills, and how those roads made the Empire. I talked of that great old road under the trees above Mickleham that crosses Epsom Downs by the racecourse (they all knew that) and I talked of that road which you can still see at Blackstone Edge, with the

heavy flags as the Romans laid them. And I had them listening.

"Then a man who had worked on the Uganda Railway joined in, and a navvy who had laid wood pavements in London, and another man who was working, when the war came, on the new road by the Ouse down to the sea. Before we had done talking we all knew that roadmaking was the finest work in the world.

"I shall never smell the heavy smell of damp clothes again without thinking of that scene; and how the man from East Africa spoke, in little unexpected flashes, of the wonder of his work; and how the navvy from London laid down the law of roads, and, whatever you might say of Roman stone, would not allow that any road was a real road unless it were built of wood.

. . . . . .

"I often think of what de Musset wrote, that if a man despaired of being a poet he should shoulder his pack and march in the ranks. It is when we march that I do all my thinking. With this perpetual work in the open, if I sit down to think I fall asleep; and there is no thinking as we work. Then the body takes possession of the mind. Sometimes a line of a song, or the last

sentence I thought before we took up tools, will occupy it all the day. It can go no further. But when we are marching then it can roam. While my body drones on in the mud below, it travels on the poplar tops. I have never known it so free. I have never before so dreamed and planned, and loved the distant and delightful things as now in the prison-house of this concentrated, unresting labour of war."

. . . . . .

When the roadmaker was shot the last of his letters was still in his pocket.

"I had that dream of the two roads again the other night, but it was different. While always before I have looked forward to the old road from the road that we were making, this time I was on that old road and going up to the edge of the hill. I was nearly at the top when I stopped to look back. But the ground where the two joined was still hidden. I must have crossed it before the dream began. I wonder what had happened there."

WARRIOR TREES

OF the past of the Downs what remains? There was the time when men lived in their freedom and sweetness, high above the oak forests and the marshes, the wolf packs and the fevers of the weald; when they cut their axes and their arrowheads from the flints of Cissbury, and fought their wars on that open turf. There was the time when Vespasian led the 2nd Legion from London to conquer southern England; when the legionaries dug their trenches, and built their palisades, and lit their camp fires all along the summit of the Downs, and made the perilous journeys for water into the weald in the shelter of the deep, trenched paths. There was the time when Ella sailed in from Germany with his three ships and his sons, and through many years fought for the Downs. But of all those years, and of those little wars, which were the birth struggles of England, what remains? The morning mists still blow in from the sea, as when they came to fill the earliest dew-ponds and to

make the shivering Roman sentry long for Provence or the warm Italian plains, but time and the turf have rounded the trenches and smoothed the great camps as tides wash out sand castles. The Downs still remain, immense and tranquil and free, as they were before men came.

Only the trees of the Downs seem to be troubled by that distant past. There is a strangeness in them as if the spirit of the ancient soldiers of the Downs, Briton and Roman and Saxon, were still an influence deep below the turf that feeds their roots. The trees alone of all the things of the Downs seem to speak of remembered wars. I could believe that the wandering men who drove their flocks across the Downs, and watched in the morning the marsh fogs of the weald, and listened at night for the bark of the wolves, and the men who climbed in the darkness from the shelter of the forests and prowled round the Roman camps, still nourish with their spirits those stunted thorns that stand, forlorn and twisted, on the Downs. They seem to belong to an earlier, more savage race than the great beeches, whose roots, it may be, have found the graves of the legionaries.

Wherever the beeches grow on the slopes of the Downs they are changed. They seem to have

lost the deep-rooted steadfast content of the trees of the weald and to have gathered, waiting for some order to come. They fill the great valleys like armies, in close ranks, expectant, and when the wind moves among them it might be the first step of a sudden advance. In all the combes along the Downs between Adur and Arun are little companies of trees that are gathered close together and seem to press in against the Downs—as the British warriors must once have crouched below the Roman camps, and here and there, halfway up the slopes, solitary trees seem to wait until the time shall come to take the next step upwards.

Everywhere among the trees is this strange expectancy, as if some day an enchantment will be broken, and their roots be freed, and they themselves be turned again into armed men who will sweep upwards and over the great green rampart which lies above, and once more look southwards to the sea.

Along that rampart also where once the sentries watched, it is the trees which seem to have kept the memory of the trenched and palisaded camps. I do not think of vigilance and war when I look at the smoothed out trenches of Ditchling or even the deeper earthworks of Wolstonbury,

but at those strange and solitary circles of beeches, in which the trees grow so close together that only a flicker of light shows through their branches. Far away across the Downs you see these camps of trees, standing high and lonely and self-sufficient in the emptiness of the Downs. It is only when you come near them that you see them to be trees. In the distance they are grey and smooth as stone. They stand like fortress rocks. The winds cannot stir them.

When the enchantment is lifted, it will be they, and not the old camps of turf, which will turn to palisades, and glitter with the spear heads and the helmets and the strong short swords of the waiting legionaries. So do the trees seem still to keep the memory of wars ten centuries old, and to draw up from the ancient graves the spirit of buried soldiers. I wonder if at night, when the sheep are gathered into their folds and men have gone back to the weald, all these trees—the great circles of beeches like grey forts, and the solitary thorns, and the little hangars waiting in shelter to climb the Downs—become the toys of the children of the gods, and if this can be their great nursery, where, in the hours when men and the sheep and the flowers are asleep, they come to play at soldiers?

THE ROAD TO DIDLING

IN a manner of speaking I am now, and always shall be, on that road. Just as here and there, sometimes on this road sometimes on that, on old turf tracks and between the houses of dark and busy streets, one remembers that here, under one's feet, is a road to a Roman town, so in unexpected places do I wonder if this, on which I walk, may not be part of the road to Didling. All roads do not lead to Didling as they lead to Rome, but for three minutes of one summer evening we were on a road which went to that place and nowhere else.

No one had ever spoken of it to us; but one morning, stopping in the rain by a chalk quarry, halfway up the Downs, we found that name on the map. The name is still there. It is not an elfin name which we have never been able to find again, which came on that one morning to lead us astray, either for our sorrow or our happiness. The name is there, and the place, as I believe, is there, a solid English place of stone and flint, red

tiles and brown thatch. It lies—but what does it matter where it lies? Anyone can find it for himself on the map.

There and then, standing by the quarry against a hazel bush while the wind shook the rain drops in heavy showers off the full-leaved beech trees, we resolved to set out for Didling. We climbed the steep chalk path, and at the summit turned westwards by the turf road. The clouds lay close above us, in even and dark lines, like enormous black rafters across the sky. With those clouds above and the tall beech woods on either side, through whose branches we could see, as through little windows, far down into the weald, it was as if we were walking all this day in a great dark room. It was a room full of the wind and the rain, and from it we looked out always at a distant, fairy world. For from under the low clouds we could see, many miles distant, hills where the sun shone.

So we tramped towards Didling. Who had not been enchanted, opening his map, to have come suddenly on such a name; to have seen it, for the first time, when he was already on the road; to have found that it was not many miles away? Didling filled our day. We talked of it. We wondered what manner of place it was. We

joked about it. We made such rhymes to it as there were to make, and all day long we drew nearer to it. There was in that name something at once so comical and so romantic, so friendly and so remote, so homelike and yet so elfin, that we could not tire of it. We had never heard of Didling before. But three hours since we should have laughed if anyone had spoken of it, saying, "There is no such place, but if there were, what a strange place it must be,"—and now we should reach it by tea time.

The rain came and went. We bent to its fierceness, and then raised our heads to watch its silver squadrons go sweeping across half a county. The wind dried us as soon as the rain had passed. Far away, now here now there, we saw the sunlight mingling with the rain, but we walked always under the dark low rafters of the clouds; and at every step we came nearer to Didling that waited to welcome us and to laugh with us.

At midday we sat down to eat on a fallen tree where a road, soft with last year's leaves and black with rain, went steeply down through the woods. And as we ate we heard from that road a voice singing, loudly and triumphantly. It sang "On the road to Didling," and then linger-

ingly and softly, as if not willing to leave it, the voice repeated the name "Did-el-ling," and then it took up the song again,

"The old turf road to Didling"

and again, and in the same fond way, "Did-el-ling,"

"Sometimes you'll spy
Elves dancing by
To the sound of fiddlers fiddling, fiddling, fiddling . . ."

But how many times the voice repeated the word we could not say, for it fell very low and there was, to us, a long silence before it took up the song again, loudly, but further away than before,

"On the road to Didling,
Didling,
The old turf road to Didling,
Didling
If you hold your ear,
Perhaps you'll hear
Those fairy fiddlers, fiddling, fiddling."

At that moment the wind suddenly caught the wet tree above us and shook it fiercely, and when it had passed the voice had gone. If there was more to that song we could not hear it, though we listened for a long time.

Then we went on our way trying to sing the

song for ourselves; but we could not sing it. It was one of those tunes which run very clearly in the head, but as soon as the voice attempts to catch them they dart away. We pursued it so for nearly two miles of our road; but we could not sing it. So we tried no more. We stayed content with the tune running in our heads, not like a song that one has sung once and cannot forget, but gently, evenly, delightfully like a rippling stream.

So, too, with the words, they were clear in my mind until I tried to write them down, and then I knew that I had not got them right. All I can say is that as the man sang them they were, in some way that I cannot discover, both comical and beautiful.

Three hours later we turned aside from the turf road and went down by a steep chalk track into the weald. At once everything was very still. A great buttress of the Downs, sheltering in its curve a field of corn, held off the wind, and between tall hedges, odorous, rain-laden and covered with Travellers' Joy, we came to a road. To the left it went to villages that do not matter. To the right it went to Didling. Across the fields we could already see hay-ricks and the steep roof of a barn all golden with lichen.

Above us stood the beautiful shape of the Downs, serene and benign as the figure of an angel. We turned to the right, but before we had gone many yards we stopped again to consider our way. The road was clear, but out in the weald, where evening already began to stoop and settle gently over the fields, was a station, and the last train of the day. By which road should we be sure to catch it? At any other time this had been a trivial choice, but now with Didling already rising among the fields to welcome us, we stood there very solemnly looking at our watches. Their hands were against us, and we turned about. We turned feeling that there was something more than time which made us take the other road. We were meant not to enter Didling, though we had travelled towards it the whole day, though we had talked of it until already we seemed to know it like our own home.

We took the other road and, looking back, we could see only the gentle shape of the Downs rising above the fields. We had passed Didling by. We had not trod its street—for it could have had but one,—nor looked in at its windows, nor knocked on its doors. We had seen only that one golden roof in the distance, and we had turned aside. Yet we went on our way satisfied, and

even exalted. It was as if we had indeed entered Didling and found it as lovely and as comical as we had desired.

We went on by the darkening road, and now in our content we sang aloud nearly all the way; but it was no longer the elfin, unseizable Song of Didling that we tried to sing. We sang of simple and earthly things. About this time, we knew, far away, steak and onions were beginning to prepare for our supper, and so we sang of these. We sang of them to most of the tunes that we knew, and they seemed to us, in that splendid mood, to go equally well with them all—with tunes of comic songs and of anthems, of marching songs and of love songs. We had never thought before of singing of such things, nor had we ever before sung so carelessly, so untiringly or enjoyed so much to be singing. Didling was behind us. We had renounced it, but its influence went with us making us happy; and now we doubly possess that comical, romantic place—as a place which we have found to be all that we desired, and as a place which, some day, we shall see for the first time.

WINTER WOODS

IT is the winter woods that are haunted. Why look for fairies in the spring, when the buds are green, when the primroses first lighten the long winter darkness and the woods are too full of the beauty of this world for the mind to pass beyond it? If one would find them it must be behind the burnt and shrivelled tatters of the beech leaves that lie on the dark boughs of December. In the woods of spring what more would one hope or wish to find than the buds and flowers of this good life beginning? But the unchanging winter woods, that are dead to this world, are most like an entrance to some world beyond. In their silence the mind travels onward, searching for strange places, with eyes that look and ears that listen for the enchantments of another world. It is then, between the dead brown leaves, that one might at any moment see the holly-berry red of fairy caps, or look into fairy faces through the cloudy windows of the white ice at the edge of the dark pools.

The silence of the winter woods is not the silence of death, as is commonly said, but the silence of suspense. They are not woods where everything has happened but where anything might happen; and there is this great difference between them and the woods of summer, that the woods of summer are loveliest when you go into them and the woods of winter when you pass them by—the woods of summer as you lie in their heart and watch the wind shake down the sunlight out of their rustling leaves, the woods of winter as you march towards them looking at that dark and turreted wall which they make against the sky.

These winter woods are not the frosted woods which are as gay and beautiful as the woods of spring, so that the heart sings in them though they are silent, but the black woods of the grey time, the woods that throw no shadows. None could walk towards them without the hope of finding something strange and beautiful within. They are of greater stature than the woods of spring. The smallest copse has the mystery and grandeur of a forest, and a belt of trees against the low winter light is like a majestic entrance to the sky. They are not trees growing from the earth, but pillars holding up the

sky. Their tops touch its light. They stand like stone.

Somewhere in the heart of these winter woods are all the castles of romance, beyond that dark mist of the close and naked twigs which hides them more securely than all the heavy greenery of summer. It must have been in a winter wood, a wood that never budded nor blossomed, whose black branches grew closer and closer, and whose twigs wove between them a darker and darker mist, that the Princess slept for a hundred years. All round that enchanted wood were single fir trees, raven black, as fir trees are in the grey of winter afternoons, like sentinel towers on the edge of mystery, and from its depths rose the peaks of solitary trees standing like pinnacles of rock against a low yellow sky which did not change. Within it, at its very heart was a wood of larches, most mysterious of all the trees, for in winter they are not a wood at all until you touch them, but a grey cloud. Beyond them was a great brown wall of beech leaves, and within that wall the sleeping palace lay, a palace built of wood which through those hundred years of sleep had slowly turned to trees again; but since they too sleep in that long winter enchantment, they put forth no green leaves but only dark

twigs. Little by little the tall windows drew across themselves a lattice of their own branches, and the wood carving of the rooms turned very slowly into twisted tree stems, and the fading gold upon them to withered leaves. So the wood stood round the sleeping Princess for a hundred years, black when all the world about it was green, and still black when all the world was white with frost.

No time in all the year is more beautiful than the end of a winter's day, when the mild stillness is touched by an evening frost, and all the towns lie hidden in mist and you walk beside those silent woods watching them turn to stone in the dusk. At such a time the trees and bushes of the gardens that you pass, as you go towards the town, have the freshness and the majesty of the woods. It is then, in that frosty and darkening winter air, that the sweet breath and magic of the country, which in the summer would long since have left you, come far with you, and blow a little way into the very streets of the town.

THE MAP

THIS happened on the road one day. You know how sometimes far inland you will suddenly smell the sea in the wind. That day, on the French road, I smelt England in it every time I lifted my head and it blew on my face. And all that had happened was that I saw a man sitting by the road looking at a map. He was holding it wide open like a newspaper.

It was an odd thing to see a Bartholomew's half-inch map on a roadside in France. As he held it I could read the name. It was my own old map; and all its hills suddenly rose up before me in their clear and even line against the sky. I went across to him.

"Can you tell me," said I, "if this is the road to Lullington?"

He jumped, and I took a corner of the map and looked at it. There was the beautiful, familiar curve of the coast, and the roads that I had travelled and the names that I knew. But for one moment they looked very strange. All

names are comic until you know them, and after Montreuil and Arras and Amiens they were, for the first moment, comic—broad and blunt and comic as I read them—Plumpton and Iford and Glynde, all the little villages that you look down on from the hills—but only for a moment and then I was back among them again. And there across the wandering twisted English roads lay that faint unswerving line which marked what once had been the Roman road. It was like a sudden shadow, thrown on that peaceful coloured map, by these great war roads of France.

Then I discovered what I had never known before, that an old map is full of odd windows—little odd windows opening into the past. As I followed the many ways I had gone, road by road, name after familiar name all across from the silver birches of Tilgate to the Seven Sisters looking out to sea, those windows kept opening to me. Memories of little things long forgotten came out of the map to me. They came as sudden, as vivid, as unexpected as that smell of the sea in the wind.

We looked at the map together for some time, remembering things. Then the man spoke.

"You know that St. Crispian speech?" he said abruptly. "It's about the only thing I learnt at

school that I still remember, not all of it, just the bit from 'Old men forget.' I remember how I cried over it and thought I could never learn it, and had it driven into me word by word, and now I couldn't forget it if I tried—'Old men forget,' and then the English names, like a drum rolling,

> Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
> Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester——"

He stopped and looked at me.

"That map's full of Crispian speeches," he said. "You can make them up as you go along and all as fine as Shakespeare," and he began to chant,

> "Midhurst and Petworth, Amberley, Poynings,
> Hurstpierpoint, Bramber . . . "

And so he went on in sonorous iambics, rolling off the names, until those little villages—red cottages and dark beech trees under the bare Downs—sounded like a battle cry of the names of great men.

"That map's better than all the songs," he said, "and if I didn't carry a map I think I'd carry a railway guide. Then I should have all England in my pocket. What more do you want to know of any place than its name and how far it is to go there? But England is too big for any one man. This is my bit."

He put his finger on the map and moving it along the grass track on the top of the hills came to the two crossed swords above Houndean Bottom, and the date 1264.

"We lived across the valley from there," he said. "It seemed very wonderful then to have a battlefield so near home. We'd look at it across the water-meadows. The sun used to set just over it and turn it all red. I used to think there were always men fighting somewhere over there where the sun set. It made life exciting, and, when the sun had gone, rather fearful too. One never knew then what might not come galloping down the big road.

"It seemed to be years that I waited and wanted to see that battlefield, and then in the end I saw it, and it was nothing but a slope of the hills, like any other, with sheep feeding on it. I could have cried. Half the charm went out of life when I saw those sheep. There seemed nothing left to wonder about, or to be afraid of when it began to get dark. Well, I've seen battlefields now.

"I went over on the Somme with the names of that part in my head—Wilmington, Friston, Beddingham, and Firle—the last time I went through Firle it was August and there was an old

lady in her garden dusting her hollyhocks. When I was wounded I crawled into a trench, a chalk trench, and lay there. I must have got light-headed, for I thought I was down on the shore under the cliff by Cliff End, and the sea was coming in with a sou'wester behind it—that must have been the guns—and I could not get away. I think in my fright I tried to crawl up the trench side, and then I tried to say those names over again but they would not come right, until at last I got Wilmington—just that one; and I said it over and over again, slowly, when I felt I needed it. You know how men clutch themselves sometimes when they have been hit, as if they were afraid that they would break into pieces. My head felt like that, but that name seemed to keep it together—'Wilmington.' . . ."

All the time as we talked, you understand, we were looking at the map together, following the roads, and the roads leading our thoughts. We talked of the inns that we both knew, and what we had eaten and drunk there. We went by those roads with giant strides. We visited each village like gods.

"You'll think it absurd," he said, "but I always see those villages as candle-flames. It came to me like that one night, when there were

all sorts of strange glares and coloured lights in the sky and sudden bursts of firing. When I thought of those quiet villages, and the night quite still all round them, they seemed like nothing so much as steady, mellow candle-flames, burning there all along the roads as you look over them from the Downs.

"Some of them have burnt there untouched since that last battle. They may burn on for centuries more, and yet—half a day of war would snuff them all out. . . ."

He suddenly gathered up the map and thrust it into his pocket; and we got to our feet.

"Midhurst and Petworth, Amberley, Bramber,
Wilmington, Friston, Beddingham and Glynde . . . "

He was chanting the names as he went on his way.

THE COUNTRY BREAKFAST

WHATEVER may be the fashion in town the breakfast party is no country institution; and that no doubt was why it caused such excitement in the village (though this we did not know until later) when we invited ourselves to breakfast. As we tramped dustily in, half an hour after the appointed time, our hostess met us in the middle of the road before her door. She was in a state of great excitement and distress. If you lived in a village and had never before entertained a breakfast party you would not have been tranquil. Imagine her, living alone, with no one to share her anxieties, already past her youth and about to give her first breakfast party.

She had waited; and we did not come. The tea was in the pot; the kettle-lid danced upon the steam; and still we did not come. Everything was prepared—that is to say everything except the eggs. She must, I think, have looked fearfully at them many times in that half hour. For you can do nothing with eggs in advance. There they lay, cold and horribly unready.

I have never heard of anyone being haunted by an egg, but I can conceive it as a terrible thing. For there is an awful expressionless tranquillity about an egg. Even to the process of boiling it is utterly indifferent. Boiled or raw it is outwardly the same. To anyone in the nervous state of that good woman this peculiar indifference must have become maddening. I can imagine her in the end wildly wondering whether or not she had boiled them, and obsessed with a terrible longing to break them open and see.

It must have been about twenty-five minutes after the breakfast hour that the sight of those eggs became more than she could endure. Anxiety can make us all utterly reckless. She could wait no longer. She put them on to boil. We were not in sight, yet she put them on to boil; and immediately a more terrible anxiety succeeded to the first. Would we come before they were boiled too hard?

You can understand now why she met us in the street. Not until we were seated and the eggs cracked and found, after all, to be still soft, was peace again in that house.

Breakfast is the meal at which anything might happen. There is no dish of which you can say beforehand that it will be out of place at break-

fast. It is the meal for experiments. Its very name premises that one may eat what one likes. Supper is the eating of a sop; lunch is but a hunk of bread; at tea—one drinks tea; but observe that at breakfast one is committed only to break one's fast; the method is not prescribed by the name, and everyone may do it according to his choice. Mine is for a varied and elaborate breakfast—a breakfast of unexpected dishes, and I read with a special delight of that breakfast beginning with fried eggs and cocks' combs which Brother Eusèbe served to M. Chicot at the Priory of the Jacobins. But in the country, where all food has a flavour of freshness, an early morning dew upon it, which has long since gone by the time it reaches our tables in the town, an austere breakfast has its own charm. To sit at a table where it has never been conceived that breakfast could consist of more than eggs and bread and butter is to feel ashamed of the over-decorated tables of town. There must of course be enough of each; they must have their early-morning freshness, and then what more could one desire than this virginal feast? When Adrian found Richard Feverel at breakfast by the Solent Richard had just eaten seven eggs (that is if we allow two for Lucy as the feminine maximum) but we are not

all Meredithian young men. It is possible to be content with fewer.

And then we had discovered the perfect hostess for such an occasion. From the moment when we stumbled out of the morning heat down the stairs into the dining room (it was one of those old houses that have every room on a different level) until the moment when we set out on the road again she did not cease talking. It was not one of those treacherous monologues with sudden pauses, abrupt and unsuspected chasms to engulf the inattentive, but a fresh, vivacious, unstaying flood of talk which neither got nor asked for answers. It flowed and rippled over us. We had come in hungry and hot, and we ate in tranquillity beneath its shelter as one can sit, cool, dry, and luxuriously lulled by the noise, under the arch of a waterfall.

In town we do not talk to our friends of all the preparations that we might have made to entertain them. Though why we should not talk to them of these things I do not know. It is the best of natural good manners, the true warmth of welcome, the most delicate flattery—thus to let one's guests share in the reminiscence of all the anxieties, the preparations, and the thought for their coming. This is at once to make them at

home. It is most hospitably to open to them not only the rooms but the very cupboards of the house. So we were made welcome. We heard of all that had been done, and all that had been said in the preparation of that breakfast—how the table had been laid the night before that all might be ready for the untimely feast, and how the curious neighbours had dropped in. For it was an event without precedent in that village. Tea drinkings there were in plenty, but no one had ever before given a breakfast party. There were no rules to follow, and so the neighbours came, for unless they saw they could not imagine how a breakfast party was got ready.

At that point I was disturbed for the only time in my tranquil eating of eggs and bread and butter under that sheltering talk. I was sent to get the kettle from the hob that my fourth cup might be filled.

It is not to be supposed that with all this talk we were neglected, or left to search the table for ourselves. A nurse could not have been more watchful of our wants. The cups were almost taken from our lips to be replenished. The eggs were lifted from our plates and others put in their place almost before our spoons had done with them. We wanted for nothing. And as she

talked and watched she broke a piece of toast on her plate, for she herself had breakfasted long before we came that she might give undivided attention to our entertainment. With her eccentric ways, her naïve and anxious preparations, her alert and hospitable eye, her unceasing talk, I salute her again as the perfect hostess. Even her nervousness, so candidly confessed, had but served to put us at our ease.

She waved us farewell as she had welcomed us, standing in the middle of the road before her door.

THE THUNDERSTORM

IT was the full summertime, a hazy and still day. The heat seemed to come not from the half-hidden sky but from the burning white road; and though it was near noon the Downs were grey and very distant. For by day, even when the air is clear, their high line seems far away, mysterious, and the world beyond them scarcely to be attained. There were no clouds in the sky, but there was no depth of blue either. That hot grey shadow, the sure warning of a storm, which is flung by nothing and does not move across the earth like the cool shadow of a cloud but lies upon the light itself, had passed between the earth and the sky. The coolness of the turf was gone, and all the colours seemed sucked from out of the world. Only the road was fiery white. On such a day of grey heat the weight of many years seems to press upon the limbs.

A little after it left the town, and before it opened out on its great curve above the valley and turned towards the Downs, the road sank

very deeply between its banks. On this day they had the hard look of walls. They threw no shadow, but they seemed to hold all the dust of the road and to gather into them all the heat of the sky. Out of this prison the road lifted on to the curving shoulder of the hill with all the water meadows of the broad valley beneath. From here we looked straight across at the Downs and saw the little chalk path rising up them. In the greyness and heavy silence the only clear thing was that high chalk path far ahead. By it we knew that we should come to our first breath of coolness and a sudden sight of the sea. For there was no coolness at all in the unshaded space of the water-meadows nor in the dull and still surface of the stream, but only a hope of it beyond that distant road.

We crossed the empty valley and came to a village where, for the first time, there were shadows in which the eyes might cool themselves, broad shadows under the beech trees and little shadows under the ivy leaves of the church tower, and a shadow, deep and dark as a grave, within the porch. Through a single arch of trees across the road we looked forward at the delicate line of the Downs. From this road the path, that had been our mark all across the valley, went up

through the turf. Its glittering chalk surface was without dust, and in the smooth and calm face of the Downs there was, not coolness, but a relief from the dust pall of the road and the weighing odour of the heat.

Already the shadow which had lain all morning on the light was growing deeper; and the valley now behind us was very dim. The whole world, that had lain all morning as if dead beneath the heat, seemed to be changing into a grey ghost of itself, a ghost that was growing, each minute, vaguer and mistier, and that presently would dissolve and be blown away with the first breath of the wind. But there was still no wind, though once, in the hot silence, a lonely flutter, with a faint smell of salt, touched our faces.

On the crest of the Downs the chalk path disappeared in the turf, as a stream goes underground, and there we came suddenly on the sea. Below us were long empty valleys, and the last broad reach of the river, dull and hard as lead, and dark houses and the masts of ships at its mouth, and beyond these the sea, grey like the land but with a faint scatter of the gold dust of the sun.

Away to the eastwards, where the sky was growing darker, rolled the smoke of a gorse fire.

It was the only thing that moved in all the pressing stillness. Within the smoke glowed broad orange flames, and within these flames other and smaller flames, red like holly berries, sharp and curled like holly leaves. At their vicious touch each great gorse bush fell, with one rending crackle, into grey ashes, and was left a black and twisted skeleton. The smoke moved slowly along the Downs, and as it rose disappeared into the greyness above, so that from those great-bellied clouds of smoke seemed to have come that shadow which filled the whole circle of the sky, and those orange and red flames to be the fires beneath the cauldron of the storm.

It came stealthy and disguised upon us from beyond the rolling smoke. It came with no crash and parade of its forces. There were no clouds in the sky, but only darkness. No wind blew, and the first sounds of thunder were like the unintended muttering and shuffle of a great crowd striving to move in silence.

These empty spaces of the Downs are without shelter, and we waited on the open turf. Below us at the shallow head of a valley a flock of sheep was gathered, so close and still that in the grey light it was like a slope of the dun-coloured turf. Then at last the storm began to take shape above

the sea. The darkness gathered and sank, coming out of the sky into a long line of clouds that hung low over the very edge of the shore. These clouds were black above, and below the colour of bronze. The shore was black and desolate in their shadow, but in the narrow space between the two the sea shone with a pale and distant light. So clear was it and so far away under the dark and evil brow of the storm that it seemed as if suddenly we should see through it, small and clear, the shores and houses of France.

The line of the clouds sank lower and lower, as if they would fall bodily upon the shore and crush it beneath their bronze shields. Then the storm broke across that narrow bar of the pale light of the sea, and the lightning stabbed furiously out of the clouds at the shore. There was the darkness of the clouds above and the darkness of their shadow on the shore below; and across that serene light between them ran the crooked and vicious flames. Then the rain fell, and the rain drops were so great that they shone in the dimness like silver. The cornfield that filled the bottom of the valley moved a little to the rain and looked like a mild green lake. The sheep did not stir. They had faded altogether into the colour of the turf. There were no trees to bend

and sway in terror before the anger of the storm, and the Downs lay under its darkness as easy and untroubled as a pool when a shadow passes over it.

The rain fell, and it seemed as if the world, which had been dissolving under the heat into a grey ghost, would now be washed away. Then the rain ceased; the heavy brow of the sky lifted, and the storm passed; but that hot ominous shadow still lay on the light of the day, and somewhere beyond it, unseen, the storm waited.

It had left the world utterly spent. The rain had washed from it the last sign of life. The last colour was gone. The bitter red flames of the gorse fire were quenched, its smoke had disappeared, and the dark skeletons of the gorse bushes stood up from the turf, darker and more gaunt than before. The sea no longer sparkled faintly, nor shone with that pale clear light. It lay beneath the even grey sky, as leaden and motionless as the land.

So the day passed, weary and without joy. The day passed and the night came, hot and still, beneath a sky where no lights shone, an unseen sky, that seemed, so heavy was the night, as if it might have been within hand's reach above one's head.

THE THUNDERSTORM

At last, under the darkness, the storm crept stealthily away. Suddenly a single star shone out, clear, beautiful, and distant, and at the sight of it the sky seemed suddenly to lift. It was as if a window had been opened in a hot room and the wind had blown in.

THE LITTLE STREAM

THERE was a man in one of the fairy tales who could hear the grass growing—a wonderful thing to do, but how he must have loved the sudden, awesome silence of midsummer when all the hay was cut! Yet even without his terrible gift there is one living thing which one can both see and hear as it grows, and that is a little stream. Nothing in the world grows so noisily, or so fast, or with such delight to be growing.

One long warm afternoon in the Cumberland hills I went all the way with a stream as it grew, down a winding valley from the summit of High Street—a lonely valley with great slopes of deep green bracken, with grey rocks and scars of red earth—and in among its tufts of grass the delicate lance-heads of rushes, brown as the fresh turned soil, and flashing green mosses, and the blood-red leaves of the Venus fly-trap, an empty sun-bleached valley, but with all the colours hidden somewhere in it.

Among the scatter of grey rocks at the valley

head, in a crumbled black cup of earth, was the beginning of the little stream, and round the cup lay mosses, exquisitely fine, whose tendrils floated away and at a touch seemed to dissolve. Out of this cradle cup of earth the little stream crept and felt its way, like a blind kitten taking its first steps. It spread hesitatingly among the moss and grey pebbles, and then, as if frightened to be abroad, slipped under ground again. But it soon got courage, and up it came, and fell with a splash into a little brown pool.

There is no word to describe that first call of the little stream. It was something like the tinkle of glass, and something like the chirrup of an insect, but really like nothing but itself—that first sound of new-born water. Nor is there any little sound among the hills so beautiful except, perhaps, the clear ring of tiny stones on the screes. So the little stream came to life and started on its way.

At first it flowed very carefully. Its waters came most delicately over the stones. They seemed to flicker like a candle flame, and to be as easy to snuff out. But soon it cut its narrow channel deep, and the long grasses stretched above it, and its courage rose, and its voice grew louder. Then it fell over its first rock with the

deep sound of full water. That was the second call of the little stream. It was not only alive now, but glad to be alive. It felt its own strength; and suddenly it went onward faster than any feet could keep pace with it.

A river is always inhuman. Beautiful or sad, boisterous or lazy, stately or terrible, or any one of a thousand different things it may be; but it is always inhuman. For its energy is without effort. It flows on, and neither knows nor cares whither, or why, or how it flows. But that little stream was very human. It seemed to love what it was doing. I could see its delight. I could see it stretching its silver sinews as it hurried. Only to be moving was its desire. It cared for nothing else: "Faster then, faster then, faster then," was its song. It hurried and spluttered. It tripped and it tumbled. It was up and on again. Its waters rushed along the smooth rocks like boys hurrying down a slide. It plunged from pool to pool like a diver throwing up his heels. It cared nothing for the tranquil hills round it, nor for the stones in its course, nor the grass tufts on its banks; and if it stopped in a quieter pool it was only for a moment before it hurried on from rock to hollow, from grey pool to brown. At first we had gone together, it and I, but now it was with

me, and far ahead of me, and tumbling behind me, all at the same time; and I knew then that we were near the end of our companionship.

With a last plunge the little stream fell into one of those beautiful pools which are neither grey nor green, but a colour of their own, a colour still without a name, the colour of perfect purity.

There the little stream ended. It flowed out of that pool, but it was changed. It was a burn or a beck, or what you will, but it was no longer a little stream. It flowed on, with rapids and falls, by stagnant back-waters where the flies skated, and by greater pools where men fished and bathed. It flowed on without effort, and it neither knew nor cared whither or how it flowed.

It is said sometimes of the hills that they defy time, but they are merely indifferent to it. It is the rivers which defy time, for they are always changing and always the same; they can be all ages as they will. They can rollick in youth and ripple placidly in middle age, and drag their steps among their stones, old and decrepit; and they can do these things in any order they will, and do them over and over again. They can be old before they leave their first valley, and young again the moment before they plunge into the sea. But a little stream cannot do these things.

THE LITTLE STREAM

It cannot defy time. Once it has ceased to be a little stream it can never become one again. And this little stream, my companion, came to an end in this pool which was as clear and serene as untroubled sleep.

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THE EXILE

HE had the peasant's great attachment to his soil. To him Belgium was that acre in Brabant which was his garden. He was a tree taken from the earth. His patriotism was not an idea on which even in exile, he could feed the soul. Still less was it an affair of governments or men. It was for him home.

> C'est la douce folie
> De recolter ce qu'on sème,
> Et l'absurd passion
> De posseder ce qu'on aime.

It was literally of the earth.

He was a man of great ignorance and great curiosity. Both were singularly attractive. Of England he had known nothing at all. He saw it for the first time on a railway map at Ostend during his flight, and wondered if so small a place could offer him any safety. Yet even this naïve astonishment did not get the better of his thrifty good sense. He met English soldiers as they landed, and changed his Belgian for their English

money, so that in the end he came to England with a pound's worth of English pennies in his bag.

The sea he had never seen before. At any other time to have embarked on it would have been an awful adventure. But at that moment with the terror behind he would, he said, have set out for America without a thought. When he was settled in an English sea-side town the first fresh wonder of it returned to him. The tides were a perpetual marvel, and he would hardly credit it that the wind could make the waves—though the rumour of such things had reached his village. He delighted to talk of all these wonders. Indeed all natural science delighted him. He could not hear enough of the earth and the stars. He was untravelled but he had a continual and eager curiosity. He had that upstanding quality of mind which is neither silent nor overcome, but remains always interested and critical before any new thing. And so when, in middle age, he was rudely thrust into this first great journey of his life, when he found himself with his family, a little money, and a single bag in an unknown country, he was neither abashed nor fumbling. He carried himself as he should. There was something singularly engaging in the

contrasts of his character, the untravelled ignorance which he never tried to conceal, his tact and good sense as of a travelled man.

On men and manners he had his ideas. Some of them, he said, he kept to himself, in his village. They would have been looked at askance. They would have come to the ears of the curé. His delight was great when he found that these ideas which were his own, which he dared not share, were the ideas of many men.

Romance he did not understand. To him it was the feuilleton of a halfpenny paper. The world, he thought, was already so full of wonders to be discovered, like the waves and the tides, that he could not understand why men should trouble to invent things. When Dumas was brought (from the very small French shelf of the local library) he put him aside with a shrug. They were romances, he supposed. His wife might read them. For himself, he had not the taste. But in the absence of anything more scientific he consented to look at La Bruyère's "Characters," and was greatly entertained. He showed a child's delight when he found among them reflections which he had already made for himself in his observation of men.

Yet though Romance was hidden from him he

spoke of his village, of the characters and the fields and the woods, the labours and the plays, of that little place—and of his delight in them—all unconsciously with the poet's speech. He had the poet's speech because he had never lost the eagerness of a child. He loved his tools almost as living things. He possessed his house as a child would possess a toy house. He talked of all that it contained like a child fondling its toys. And so, though he did not know it, that village became as he spoke like a place in a book, clear, detached, complete, touched with humour and enchantment.

There was his friendship with the burgomaster, the great man of the village; there was the village concert where the famous singer from Brussels, spending her holiday in the country and singing by great condescension, was unapplauded, while the village comedian brought down the house. He acted the little scene of the gaping uncomprehension of the villagers changing to broad delight.

There were the days that he spent in the winter woods cutting fuel, and his happiness in the mere presence of the earth and the trees. There was that summer evening when he heard an unseen horn, far away in the stillness, playing a mourn-

ful old hunting air, and he climbed to the roof of his house with his ochrina and, sitting there, played it back through the dusk. He described it until you almost smelt the smoke of the evening going up from the fields.

But it was only his own soil that wakened the poet in this exile who did not know Romance. He marvelled at the sea, but at the woods and fields and hills of England he looked with an unseeing eye. They were not his home.

Many men are indolent in misfortune, but he rose briskly to its opportunities. If he did not go travelling by his own choice, he would at least not refuse its benefits. His curiosity and his pleasure in new things were his support. Yet at heart he remained an exile. It was only as he worked in a garden that he felt himself once again in Brabant. Then, as he turned the earth, he was near his home; but the thought of it troubled him always. What would become of that square grey house, with the garden and the clump of osiers, on its little eminence in the Brabant plain? They were more than worldly goods. They were his Belgium.

He was safe, cared for, prosperous, but "la douce folie" drove him home. He knew at least, when he set out, that his house had not been

destroyed. But how much more of the rest, that he went to seek did he find—of the village and all that pleasant company of which he used to speak?

He might have been less an exile if he had stayed in England, and nearer to his old home, talking and dreaming of it, and turning the earth in an English garden.

SHEEP ON THE DOWNS

OF all the figures of speech which the Bible has made most familiar in our mouths none is stranger than the Lamb of God. We have forgotten in it the literal meaning of lamb; we have forgotten the original Hebrew meaning of the burnt offering of a lamb to God. That phrase has been lifted far away from all that it once was, and now, beautifully but strangely, it expresses for us, through the gentleness of a timid and stupid animal, the most courageous and wonderful gentleness in the world.

Language is full of these words that lead double lives. It is indeed one of the great proofs that words do indeed live. Those who work with them work with living things. Let us remember this and use them with reverence. Neither wood nor stone, gold, nor the richest colour, nor any other of the things that men use in their arts is living but only words.

If one wanted any other proof that words are living things it is that the language is full of dead

words, words that men have killed by using them too much, or by misusing them. But many of them get no rest even in death, for men who do not know that they are dead—since they never realised that they could live—drag their corpses about and hang them up on their sentences, as savages decorate their huts with scalps and bones.

And we all take up our pens, and order the words out, and turn them and twist them, and hustle and push them, until we have them where we think that they should be. We even play tricks with them, and, in our assurance, tell them to mean things that they never meant before. And these words that we so lightly use were living centuries before us, and will be living long after we are gone—long after what we did with them, whether good or bad, has been forgotten. They are living things. Associations have gathered about them. Great men have used them, and they have lived on enriched by that companionship. They have memories fuller than the memory of any man. To those who have the ears they speak of a thousand things that they know and of a thousand places where they have been.

We pick up this or that piece of stuff and say, "This was part of the dress of Queen Elizabeth. How strange to think that she actually wore it!

It makes one realise that she was a living woman more than all the history books." Or we look round a panelled room, and murmur, "What a funny old bed. There were no spring mattresses in those days, but how wonderful to think that Charles I. actually slept in it. He must have looked out of this window standing where we are now before he went down to breakfast—but perhaps they didn't have breakfast then. Really one wouldn't be surprised to see him come in at that door." Or we stand in front of a Crusader's sword: "To think that perhaps this black mark is the blood of a man who died centuries ago. This does make one feel the past. I wish they did not say we are not to touch."

But no one ever thinks in this way of words or remembers how old they are, or treats them as living things, things which are not forbidden to him to touch, but which he may use, and which unite him with many centuries, and with great men long since dead. No man has ever said to another, "Sir, that word you have just spoken (though you have not used it in quite the right sense) gave much delight to Chaucer. You have only to see how he used it here and used it there, to know that he must have loved the very sound of it." Or, "Speak that word with some rever-

ence. You can see, reading it in such a play, that it was like a trumpet to Shakespeare. It stirred him to the heart. When he wrote it down he was looking out across all England, and remembering his love for the fields and woods and river of his own home. He saw men going out to die for her. He must have felt, for that moment when he wrote it, as if his quill feathered an arrow which he was fitting to a long bow. Do not use that word ignobly. It may be a poor thing to you, but it has lived greatly."

Though we do not speak in this way, nor remember the history of words; nor think of them as uniting us to our past; nor feel that great men live in them, as much as in the clothes they wore or the swords they carried or the rooms where they slept, yet unconsciously we are under the influence of their rich companionships. These indeed do change them. So that not only may the same word mean entirely different things and we not feel it strange, but the very sound of it be changed to our ears, and, according to its meaning, be noble or mean, beautiful or ugly. It is only the very childish or very primitive mind which feels it comic that one word should mean two different things, or be reminded of the one when he hears the other.

So it is with this strange word "lamb." I still have a well-inked school-book called "Chosen English" in which, above the essay on Chimney Sweepers, some unknown hand wrote, after the word "Lamb," "And Mint Sauce." I believe that I was annoyed at the time; for that essay, with its rich and coloured quaintness, was a new country of words for me; but now I treasure the book for the sake of that annotation.

Lambs of the flock, lamb and mint sauce, Charles Lamb, the Lamb of God—there is no word in all the language so modestly born, that has lived such a variety of wonderful lives and has been so enriched and ennobled by its past.

Yet there is another reason why that last and most singular phrase, the Lamb of God, might suddenly and fantastically be chosen by a mind which knew nothing of its past, to describe a gentle God come to earth among men. For literally, as one looks at a flock of sheep on the Downs, it might be something come from the sky. There is nothing on earth more like the gentle, wandering, white clouds of summer. So do the sheep wander across the green curves of the Downs which are as smooth as the hollows of the sky above. They move exactly like the summer clouds, never still yet never hurrying, always

changing yet always the same, dividing, uniting, wandering on, as gentle and unconcerned as a cloud, until they slip over the crest of a hill and are gone, as if, like a cloud, the sun had drawn them away. And the grey sheep-dogs pass in and out among them, moving them this way and that, turning them and guiding them, all unconscious, like little puffs of dark wind blowing through the clouds.

On this day that I have in mind we were coming down one of the deep coombes above Firle, where the chalk path went between banks of my lady's bedstraw, and in the fields that filled the bottom of the hollow was a shepherd with his flock. The sheep were gathered in a dark patch, rather deep in growth, and the shepherd stood beyond, an old man who moved very stiff and slow. Then his high harsh, and, as it seemed, scarcely human voice came up to us, and suddenly his dog had split the flock, as the wind will suddenly split the clouds on a stormy day right through to the sun.

Sheep feed so quietly, move so suddenly when the dog moves, and stop so abruptly when he has passed, that they seem to have a very great speed, and this change from utter peace to furious movement, and back to peace again, is as

awesome as the sudden coming and going of the wind round a house on a still night. The dog seems to run with such savagery, the sheep to fly with such terror, and then—the dog is sitting quietly on his haunches, and the sheep are feeding again as though through the whole day they had not moved more than a step at a time, nor lifted their heads from cropping. It is like the beginning of a sudden tragedy, and the stillness afterwards, but the tragic act itself left out. And all the while the master of the show stood at the back not moving, and we heard the high distant sound of his voice but no intelligible words.

Then he counted his flock, and the dog gathered it together again, and it drifted away until a curve of the hillside hid it, the dog moving like a shadow on the turf and the sheep like a wandering cloud.

ROADS OF WAR

IT was in a mining village in the north of France, and troops were going through, stumbling and splashing and singing and then falling suddenly into silence. The road was horribly worn, with deep holes full of black liquid mud, yet on this windy autumn afternoon it was a strange and wonderful road. Just beyond the village it rose a little from the flatness and made a firm ridge against the sky, and along the ridge and across the road the rain was blowing in sudden silver gusts. When they passed the air was very clear, and it looked as though from that road, ending abrupt and clean at the top of the ridge, one could step straight into the clouds.

I had been watching the road for some time when I saw the Frenchman standing close under the wall of a house across the village street. I saw him when he waved to one of our men. He looked to be over middle age—of solid and rounded figure with a heavy spade beard—but when I crossed and spoke to him, and he turned,

I saw only the youth of his eyes, and, as he spoke, of his vivacious hands.

"What am I doing," said he, "in the wind and the rain? I watch the troops and the road. I am a lover of roads," and he smiled. Then he drew himself up. "I have worked on the roads," he said, "I was of those who worked on the road that saved France;" and at that he crossed himself.

A battalion went by and we two stood watching it. As the last company passed over the ridge the rain blew down again and hid the men. It came with the suddenness of a door closing behind them.

"A few miles, and the road ends, is it not so?" said the Frenchman.

"Yes," said I. "Before very long they'll go underground."

"And yet," he said, "to look at it you would think it never ended, that road."

The rain gust had passed and the ridge stood up against the low clouds. I was thinking of those roads across the Downs that you see many miles away, white in the green turf, that seem to end suddenly at the steps of the sky. But the Frenchman was thinking of other things.

"You might cross Europe by that road," he said. "Such roads are great roads. No one

knows how far one may go by them; even the sea cannot stop them. Your old roads in England, are they not after all ours? The Romans made them for you. They are the roads of Gaul that went on and crossed England as if your channel had not been there."

He raised his eyebrows as if he were waiting to see what I should say to that.

"But there are others," I said; "some that were there even before your roadmakers came from Gaul." And I told him of the old turf road from Winchester to Canterbury and then of a warm summer road lifting and falling over the feet of the Downs, a rambling, winding, beautiful road, with red villages and beech trees and towering hedges all flowers—such hedges as do not grow in France. As I talked I could almost smell its clean and kindly dust.

The Frenchman was staring up that straight road as I talked. When I finished he turned and looked at me, an odd look that was half amusement, half surprise.

"Ah—it is so that you think of roads," said he; "but you must understand that we have suffered on the roads, we French."

He paused for a moment, as if searching for what he wanted to say.

"Look," he went on; "they are to us what the sea is to you. We have laid our bones at the roadside. I could tell you tales of the roads. Three generations of us have tales to tell of them.

"When I was little and he was very old, my grandfather used to tell me a tale of the road—the road from Brussels to Charleroi, the last road that the Great Army travelled. He was only a boy when he went by it, but it was in his memory after he had forgotten nearly everything else. He would tell me how he left the road, worn out, and lay for the night in a field; and all that night he heard the army hurrying by on that road. 'Like the noise of a river in flood,' he would say, and I could see his old hands tremble 'like the Isère'—for that was the river I knew. It is always grey and tumbling. He told the tale always in the same way—for he was then a very old man—until I saw that road as half road, half river, as a road with a river pouring down it—I knew not what—and men were struggling in it, as once I had seen a man struggle in the Isère under the white bridges. But that road haunted me!

"And my father would tell his tale of the roads. They would talk together, he and old grandfather, and he would shake his head, for

the road he knew was from Metz to Verdun. He had seen the Emperor ride out on that road from Gravelotte, on his way back to Verdun, and when he saw his face—so he would tell the story—he said, 'It is finished.' All France believed then in Bazaine, but when he saw the Emperor's face that day he said, 'It is finished.' And that was before Rezonville was fought. He would tell us of that battle. He would tell us how they fought for that road, the great road from Metz to Verdun, lest the Prussians should cross it and cut them off from France, and how in the afternoon they drove the Prussians back across that road, and had them beaten, if only they had known.

"'If only we had known,' he would say sadly, and then his face would grow eager. 'But French armies will go again by that road from Verdun to Metz,' he would say. 'Do not forget, you may go with them.' And he would describe a little wood with wide clearings, by the roadside where they drove the Germans out. (It was there that he killed his German, fighting hand to hand.) He would describe it very carefully that I, when I went by that road to capture Metz, might know it again.

"And so when I shovelled there on the road up to Verdun, I thought of those two and of their

tales of the roads, and of their pride in me, could they have seen me; and I would say, 'This is the road to Metz, one must look beyond.' When all the world spoke of Verdun I looked beyond. I remembered that this also was the road to Metz."

He stopped, and we stepped close in under the wall as a column of ponderous hooded motor lorries went through the village and over the ridge. The Frenchman watched them with a kindling eye until the last had gone, then he turned to me and smiled, brushing the rain from his beard.

"Monsieur will understand," he said, "why I am a lover of roads."

THE SPRING RIVER

FOR more than a week the mill at the weir had stood idle, cut off from the stream. The river was moving too full and strong for its old joints. It was at the level of the fields, the beds of reeds were hidden; the willow trees dipped deep in its flood; the middle of its course was marked continually with ragged drifts of foam, and its waters fell across the weir with the long vibrating sound of the distant sea. They fell, smoothly, unhurriedly, in a strong clean curve as of steel; and then at the bottom they broke into water again and their foam rose, like little angry heads, and hit back hurriedly at the weir.

In that full smooth curve of water there was a spell—not the evil spell that the hurrying unending movement of water, always changing and always the same can sometimes put on the senses of men, luring their minds away until it draws them down into it to their destruction—but the good spell of a thing that holds the senses and mind together. It was the double spell of a

thing living and moving and yet at the same time fixed in a beautiful shape. That curve of water was as full and complete and unchanging as a great curve of the green Downs, or the line of a statue, but it moved more quickly than the eye could follow.

The spring flood of the river is not so beautiful nor so mysterious as the autumn flood. In the still autumn the river is a mirror of lovely things. It is deep-bosomed and the colour of old silver. It flows slowly, so brimming full that its centre seems higher than its low banks. Its willows are turned to gold; the green beeches carry golden crests, and everything—trees and fields, hedges and reeds, all the rich and coloured ripeness of autumn—is thrown into its waters with not a line broken nor a colour dimmed. At every bend of its winding course its banks meet in the reflection. You seem to pass not along your familiar river, but from pool to hidden pool; and as you enter each your way closes mysteriously behind.

But this spring flood was a hurrying of brown and naked waters in a brown world. Everything was brown, from the earth-stained river to the ploughed fields deep coloured with the rains, and the branches of the high trees. It was the last brown look of the world before the green came.

The winds had driven the mists away into the far distance, and in their place was the pale and wandering sunlight of spring, coming, going, and coming again, as the wind blew

To the bare brown branches of the hedges a few briar leaves still clung, yellow as parchment and crimson rimmed, the last forgotten flags still flying for the old year, dead three months before. But in their sheltered under-hollows the green was already coming, and all along the river banks the bare willow branches were like soft brown mists with a green shadow lurking in them.

Across that brown world the wind galloped, carrying clouds and sunshine with it. The clouds, as they passed, turned their black faces to the earth and threw back a winter darkness into the empty branches of the trees, and the wandering sunshine lit on those green shadows as they waited for their time.

But for the moment the world belonged to the hurrying river. Its banks and its trees no longer hid it. One could see it far across the fields. In the distance were curves and long reaches which no one seemed to have known to be there. In some places it flowed high and clear, in others it was a brown mist. In others, it had poured out, filled a field with silver and then hurried on. In

a little it would sink and sink again beneath the red sand and deep green eaves of its banks, and the reeds would spring up, and the willows and the grasses bend over to hide its waters; and it would flow on, easy and unconcerned, and care nothing whether it was seen or hidden.

But now it was in front of all the other things of the world. The rains had brought the new life to it, while they still waited. It would be seen. And every little stream and every ditch had the same ambition. They too were swollen with importance and sudden waters. For a little time they too were rivers. They had lain muddy and stagnant. Leaves and branches and all the dead things of the banks had fallen into them, and stayed there rotting. Their waters had grown tainted, with no power to cover the dead things or to sweep them away. And then the rains came, and they were full of fierce and living waters. They had at last the power to move, a current that could beat on the banks and strike up a song. So they went, lapping against the drain pipes, as the rivers lap round their bridges, sweeping in sudden musical rushes against the submerged twigs, whirling in gay eddies and little dancing hollows of water. To them also this sudden life had come while the rest of the

world still waited. It was as short as a gnat's life, but as gay. These ditches were the dancing, singing insects of this time when the world waited for spring. In a very little while the waters that filled them would have gone as suddenly as they had come. They would dry in the heat and be still again, and the living gnats would dance above them in the sunshine

> When the half gods go
> The gods arrive.

But for this little while it was they that lived, and danced, and sung.

THE COUNTRY 'BUS

IT was on this day, a warm day in July, that I swore to abjure from that time forward all such phrases as steam-power, petrol-power, and electric-power, as phrases made by a mechanical age to its false glorification, as phrases misusing a great word, and harmful to whatever is beautiful and truthful in our speech.

Consider the things that we burn to serve our different ends. Of them all wood is the greatest. It is the oldest, by some thousands of years, the most kindly and the most beautiful; and men by burning it have done wonderful things. It was by wood, when they first set light to it, that they first raised themselves a little above the beasts—there was power indeed!—and to this day the smell and sound of a wood fire fill men with a happiness which they cannot explain. Yet no one has ever spoken of wood-power. Men have called it a fuel from the beginning to this day. Why should petrol have a greater name? Let us keep that word "power" for the things that move

the souls of men, and call a fuel a fuel however fast we may travel by it. Some day, when the world is cured of our particular follies, a wise critic will put his finger on that word "power," and explain our age by it, pointing out how we gave it to all the wrong things.

Having talked of these false powers like the rest, I saw suddenly the folly and the vulgarity and the falsehood of it on this afternoon in July, standing by the main road from Salisbury to Blandford which goes by way of Tarrant Hinton, leaving Tollard Royal on the right and on the left Gussage St. Michael, Gussage All Saints, and Wimborne St. Giles, places which I have never seen, but whose names upon the map enrich the countryside. We had gone down by the side of a British village, under the crest of the Downs on their southern slope, where now only wild thorns grow, and by the chase where the deer-stealers used to lie hid in the trees, and across a field which of all the English fields I have ever seen did most deserve that phrase "painted with delight." Its rich and ancient turf, that can never have known the plough, blossomed, like triumphant youth, with thyme and trefoil and rock roses, and its wild strawberries were in full fruit. Purple and orange, blood-red and the pale

gold of the stars—it was painted these colours across four splendid acres of delight.

At the bottom of the field was a causeway, which once had carried a Roman road. There it was, clear, solid, not to be mistaken, raised a foot or perhaps two, above the fields. The turf now covered it and the rabbits burrowed in its sides, nor had anyone marched by it for many hundreds of years, yet in its age and decay it was still masterful. For among that open turf, without tree or hedge, one stood upon it—and how much more would not one have marched along it?—as if one were high above the surrounding country and commanded it all.

Beside it ran the modern road, smooth and beautifully clean, powdered with fine white stones that glittered a little in the sun, showing no mark of the rare traffic which travelled by it, pressing a few inches below the level of the turf on either side. It looked like a carpet which, that very morning, had been laid, fresh and new, across the fields, and by evening would be rolled up again and carried away, leaving the grasses beneath it to raise their heads in the dews of night, and the ghosts to travel by that ancient causeway of a thousand years.

To us in that contented mellow time of mid-

afternoon, as we stood between the two roads, feeling the influences which lived mysteriously in that old turf, came the country bus, lifting slowly over the full curve of the white road. It was driven—let it be said for the last time—by petrol power. But what power had petrol over it? Upon its high roof, set round with a small iron rail, its passengers stiffly sat on stools. Their multitudinous parcels—for it was market day—lay round their feet, and the ladder by which they had climbed was strapped to the bus's side. Up the short and easy hill it came, at a staid four, or it may have been five, miles an hour, and we laughed aloud with delight to see it, for it had an air that is not to be described of rustic and ancient things. It was a revelation of the enduring spirit triumphant over all material change.

Along the road there came a puff of dust towards it, and a motor bicycle went by. In that magic moment there would have been no surprise if the bicycle had suddenly stopped and a masked figure in its saddle held up the driver of the bus with a pistol. Had the bus itself come rolling and rumbling along the Roman causeway instead of the modern road, it would have seemed more natural. It was as if petrol power—the

phrase shall be used no more—instead of sweeping us onward into a glorious future of liquid and electric fuels, had suddenly gone all astray and carried us into past centuries. Tom Jones might have hailed that bus from the roadside, as he journeyed from Gloucester to London, and never noticed that no horses drew it. Mr. Wardle might have entertained luncheon party after luncheon party on its roof and never realised that he sat above an internal combustion engine. For in that motor bus still travelled the spirit of all country coaches as it must have been since roads were first made and wheels to run upon them; and neither steam nor petrol nor any such thing has had or ever can have any power over it.

Someday airplanes will have taken the place of all the buses, but still that indomitable spirit of the country road will travel on whatever machine shall fly from Salisbury to Blandford, going by way of Tarrant Hinton, and leaving Tollard Royal on the right and on the left Gussage St. Michael, Gussage All Saints, and Wimborne St. Giles

I can see it. It will be such an ancient, comic, rustic thing, lumbering above the road, that still Tom Jones might hail it without surprise, or

Mr. Wardle unpack pigeon pie and lobsters sitting on its wings.

. . . . . .

Turning we went back across the Roman road, where already the rabbits were sitting at their ease in the evening sun. We went solemnly and with a strange content. When the bus had crossed the hill and we had laughed at it, we felt as if, in that brief moment, we had slipped from the power of time and seen the borderlands beyond. For what, after all, can Eternity be, if it is not to have all the new things without losing or changing any of the old?

THE ENCHANTED FOREST

TO Keats it was full of fruits and paths and ferns, and rushes and ivy banks; and to Coleridge it was of cedar trees; and to Shakespeare of oak and thorn and elm and all the flowers of English field and hedge, and Midsummer in it came in May; and to Lucian it was of pines and cypresses growing out of the sea, and his ship sailed over its leafy tops; and to Virgil it was of pines and great holm oaks and there he found the enchanted golden bough, growing on an oak tree like the mistletoe; and to the Brothers Grimm it was full of quaint and homely things like the tree that opened with a golden key and had a basin of bread and milk inside—though what the tree was they do not say; and to Hans Andersen it stood high above the sea, and the old oak tree in it dreamed dreams.

Such a forest, so wonderful and so diverse, to be recognised by so many different things, cannot be hard to find, and many times we two thought that we had reached its borderland or were on a

road that would lead us to it. Once it was in a little wood of dead fir trees standing forlorn on the open Downs with the trees so close together that one could scarcely go into it; and within it was as dark and still as a shuttered room. Once it was in a wanton and beautiful lane which started from nowhere on the side of Windover Hill, and was so deep in tall grasses and so roofed and arched with bushes that it was less like a road than a twisting green pipe, leading down and down until we thought that it must take us at last into the very heart of ancient forests, into

> Gloomy shades, sequestered deep,
> Where no man went.

But instead it brought us out to a plain high road. And many times we thought we must be near it when we were walking on the Downs where the great trees have come up from the weald, and stand along each side of the old turf road, so that you look always downwards into the woods, among the olive trunks of the beeches where the air is like still green water, and down long low aisles of hazel bushes with little uncoloured Gothic windows at the end. But the enchanted forest was among none of these.

Then one hot day in summer when the road-side hedges were grey with dust, and the air was shimmering, and the chalk track up the Downs was more dazzling in the sun than snow, we climbed from the weald until at last we saw the sea, not cool and green and full of delight but like a great grey plain with a hard glitter of gold under the sun. So, longing for coolness and for rest, we threw ourselves down on the turf where a little wind moved, and lost all the world but the grass heads nodding above our faces and above them the sky. In that place, where the nearest tree was miles away and the tallest bush was no taller than a man, I found the enchanted forest.

The sun was hot on my eyelids, and I turned over to escape it, pressing my face deep down to the grass roots where, even on this hot day, the sun's rays had not pierced and there lingered still an odorous dampness. The grasses seemed to rise enormously above me, standing against the sky. In that drowsy dreaming heat, all of my body beyond my shoulder was asleep and forgotten. I lived only in one ear, pressed deep into the sweet moist turf, listening to the little sounds that ran softly through it, and one eye beneath a flickering lid that peered through the undergrowth. I was sunk deep in this little

forest where the ants and spiders can find shade, looking up at the slender grass stems which seemed so tall that only those with wings could ever reach their nodding heads.

It was an ant that I saw first, travelling through the forest with a load as large as herself, toiling up and down over the pathless, terrible tangle of the green grass blades. It was like a jungle laced across and across with creepers; it was like that enchanted forest in a Russian fairy tale which grew from a comb so that the witch was caught in its twisting branches and, fight as she would, could not go on. But the ant struggled up and tumbled down, never forsaking her load, sometimes pushing it up before her, sometimes moving backwards as she climbed, and drawing it after her. I seemed, as I watched her on this courageous journey, to be no bigger than she. I felt, through her, the awful toils of that jungle below the grass stems. High above me a fly sat with diamond wings. He could fly above it all; it had no toils for him; and on another stem, nearly at the tufted head, sat a snail. The slender stem bent a little under his weight. As I looked up at him from the depths below, where I stood and the ant struggled, I felt for him an envy and an admiration such as I had

never thought before that a snail could inspire. He had no wings to carry him out of that jungle. He was not better equipped than the ant and I. He had nothing but a firm grip and a determined heart, and there was he at the top of the highest tree, far above the undergrowth, sitting where the winged things came.

I had turned towards the ant again in her struggles when suddenly there came a flash of darkness on us two below as if a cloud had passed above the forest, and I looked up to see that a butterfly had settled on a grass's head near the snail. That moment's darkness was thrown by her wings before she closed them. Away beyond her was a great scarlet circle like the setting of some monstrous sun above the tree tops.

All was still for a time in that enchanted place. The butterfly and the snail and the fly sat on their tree tops. The ant had dropped her burden and returned for it. The undergrowth was full of the wet sweet smell of earth and of grass. Then, far away, beyond the great red sun and the edges of the world, came a strange shrill song, louder than all the winds. It lasted for a long time rising and falling, and at last it ceased—to be followed by a more terrible thing, for through the forest came a great green creature, not climbing

over its undergrowth, as the ant climbed, nor trampling it down as it walked, but in enormous leaps that lifted it over glade and thicket and the high tree tops. Its last leap carried it right across the face of the red sun, and it looked as if it were passing clean out of the forest into the sky, but it came to earth, crouching on the tangled undergrowth, and the song burst out again filling all the forest with its noise.

Then the song stopped—suddenly stopped, but the great green thing still crouched, and in the awesome sinister silence which followed that song I started, and sat up.

I was in my own world again. It was there unaltered, as when I had lain down, and all around was the curving sunlit turf.

I looked down at the turf where I sat. A single poppy was growing just within reach of my hand, and I saw a tiny snail at the top of a stem of grass. As I looked a grasshopper jumped before me and disappeared.

Away to the southwards was the grey sea, and northwards were the dark woods of the weald. I thought of them as they might be, in monstrous dreams, with an undergrowth so tangled and thick that no man could force his way through it; with birds as large as clouds settling on their

branches, with strange creatures in shells slowly climbing their trunks; with enormous green dragons leaping through them higher than their tree tops, and singing terrible triumphant songs that shook them as if they had been reeds.

THE FISHERMEN OF AMBERLEY

OF their craft I know nothing, nor of its pleasures. There have been fishermen in the family but I am not of these. I understand the delights of walking and sleeping in the open air, but of that subtle, and, as I can well believe it to be, that delectable state between the two extremes in which fishermen seem to live, I know nothing. I have no right to speak of them at all, except that I love them. I love them as I love the windmills, and the little solitary trees on the Downs, and the cows in the fields and the golden ricks. I love them as part of the landscape. They are not so beautiful as the willows, which, like them, dip delicate branches into the stream, but, like the willows, they breathe that perfect content of slow, silver streams and water meadows where the cattle feed and the gentle twilight of summer evening. There they sit. . . . They are common men as I. They are dressed as I. If I met them in the streets of London I might sometimes think them stout and unlovely,

but now they are changed. It is as if that line which they hold above the stream were some fairy root by which they were planted at the river's side, drawing up through it the still contentment of the grasses and the flowers.

We used to meet them on Sunday mornings on the Fishermen's Train to Amberley which started when London had scarcely begun to wake, and the early stillness of Victoria was undisturbed except by the gathering of these men from their many homes, each setting out for the meadows of the Arun with his rod in its case and at his side his great basket, of which I have never been able to determine, either going or returning, whether it was full or empty. We alone, carrying walking-sticks, were not of the brotherhood.

From the Station of Amberley we would pour out with them into the road, a little crowd all bristling with fishing rods, like a dock-side with masts. And then, in a moment, we would be alone. They had turned suddenly downwards and we had turned up—up beneath a great hedge of privet, hazel, and clematis, walking on turf that was all purple with thyme, and giving thanks that so few men, even when they are not fishermen, will go up hill when they can go down. Giving thanks I say—for fishermen are still only

men until they are dispersed along their river bank, immobile, contented, rooted deep in the stream. That path would take us up until, far away, we could feel that dim emptiness which was the sea, and behind us was sombre Parham wood with its long grey house, half hidden, and its lake which seemed on the edge of brimming over, and beyond it the grey towers of Amberley, and one curve of the Arun gleaming among the meadows where, unseen, the fishermen now sat.

So in solitude we went all day, by open turf and twisted thorn, until at evening we would find a road, and turn again towards Amberley, the chill east and the coming of night behind us, while in front the sunset blazed like a noble fire lit to welcome the gods as they came home, and the meadows of Arun were a great plain before us, full of loneliness and enchantment.

And then, at the last turn of the road round a shoulder of the Downs, we would see below us, not gods going home, but all the fishermen. They came, climbing up very slowly, out of the deep fields, and stepping along the road, and across the grey four-spanned bridge of Arun, with such an air of ripe leisure and contentment as is not to be described. Then they gathered round the door of the Bridge Inn. Above them

the train waited in the station—their train—as if it would wait on until the last and slowest of them had set down his tankard and had come.

There is no sight in the world—not cows as they go in to milking, nor the smoke of cottages rising in the quiet air at dusk, nor children sleeping when they are tired with happiness, nor men at ease with their pipes when they have eaten at the end of a hard day—no sight so full of the ease of this world, of bodies satisfied and minds at peace, as that slow ingathering of the fishermen of Amberley on a summer evening.

THE MAGICIAN OF THE HILLS

THE rain had begun again before we left the road with its low walls of grey stone. By the time that we had crossed the first field and reached the stream which we meant to follow up the valley, it was falling with a steadily increasing stroke. We pushed on. The hills stood high about us. The valley was deep and sheltered. Its heavy wet grass pressed against our knees as we moved toilsomely through it, and the clumps of heather shook the water over our feet. The disappearing hills and the still air itself seemed to be turning to grey water. We no longer felt the rain as a separate thing. A wet and breathless heat wrapped us about. We panted for dry cool air, and the only good thing, in all that clammy prison where we struggled, was the stream. Its cool and tumbling brown water seemed altogether different from the grey rain which choked us, until we almost felt that we should breathe again if only we plunged our faces into its pools.

We struggled on for two hours, leaving the stream, climbing over turf that was covered with broken boulders, and ploughing our way up a little path of screes. So at last we came to the head of the pass where great rocks stood firm in the turf and the moss; and there the world suddenly and splendidly changed. We met and knew the rain again. It no longer wrapped us round, grey, silent and stifling, but came at us with quick cold strokes that stirred us like a song. For the wind was behind it. He filled us with life.

He is the great magician of the hills. Without him that day had been nothing but the blank, unchanging wetness of the sky lying on a dreary sodden earth. With him, blowing his unseen life through it all, the sky and the earth were magically changed. Everything in those wet hills and the clouds above them, seemed, as he passed, to take shape, to put on a strange half-human life, to move as if it came from some other world beyond the hills; and then, as the wind fell, its life went out.

We crossed the pass, and climbed by a broken path up the side of the valley beyond. Across it we could see the rain moving along the face of the hill. It went in slender shadowy lines, one by

one, that stopped and gathered in the valley end, hiding the pass by which we had come. They were like beautiful half-formed figures of night coming out of the clouds. As they went so statelily by, brushing the earth and turning its colours grey, they might have been the ghosts of the sunbeams.

The wind blew, and the ghosts passed; and other and stranger forms came up from the valley—great lazy white clouds that seemed to fondle the hills as they drifted by them; and a line of black cloud, with an edge straight as a sword, and in its darkness a glow of bronze, a cloud like the sinister, half-formed shape of an invading army; and clouds that pushed grotesque heads across the hills, like monsters coming out of the fairy tales to burn whole valleys with their breath.

All the clouds and the rain and the great bare hills were as full of the life of that half-world which lies between plants and men as are the woods and the streams in the old tales. But when the wind passed their life went out, and the clouds and the rain melted once more into dismal waters. Then he returned, gathering all the clouds together, and the grey regiments of rain broke out of them, sweeping across the hills,

while we bent to them, pushing sightless through their ranks.

Even the little plants of the hillside were changed by his coming. He blew through them also a breath from a fairy world. The pale rushes moved beautifully before him with a sudden glitter like a little water thrown through a sunbeam. The brown tufts of grass bent stoical heads, and let their ragged hairs go with his blast, like patient horses, and the bracken as he shook its fronds became suddenly human—a crowd of flustered little people, rocking and gesticulating with fear, brandishing arms in comical despair. Then the wind passed; the crowd had gone, and in its place were still, graceful ferns gathering rain-pearls at the tops of their fronds.

I would not exchange such a day—full of this strange half-comical, half-magical life of the clouds and the rain and the hillside, that comes and goes with the wind like a ripple or a shadow—for all the heat and colour of a clear sky, and the wide, sun-dusty view of distant hills.

But suddenly—it was now the late afternoon—the sun came out. At his touch all was changed once more, and we with the rest. We came back to this comfortable earth. We felt the warmth,

luxuriously, for we had been wet and dried again by the wind three or four times that day. Our way was by a level valley. We were tired, and yet we walked in an ease that, for the moment, was more delightful even than physical rest. The wind had gone, taking with him all the clouds. The clear hills looked down very friendlily. The musical noise of the streams, swelled with the rains, rose more and more loudly in the still air. All the wild magic of the morning had passed, and in its place was a content of this earth. Our bodies were happy in their weariness, knowing of the rest to come. Our minds dreamed peacefully in the sun.

THE ADVENTURERS

THERE were two of them, little green fellows, swinging bravely above the dust of the road. Peering close we could see that each hung on a silver thread which seemed attached to nothing but the grey air above. One hung his full length. The other had curled himself up. Sometimes they twirled giddily. Then they would drop a little, but neither seemed in a hurry to descend. They swung in the wind, and when it came with a stronger puff we would see them for a moment at the beginning of a swift upward curve before they were lost against the green of the tree. They seemed to have been blown into space or the upper leaves, but each time they reappeared, hanging tranquilly above the road.

Several motor bicycles went by in a roar and swirl of dust, and each time we stepped back feeling sure that now the two adventurers had been destroyed or had been whirled away on a more terrible journey, but each time, as the dust settled, we found them still secure in space.

They and their invisible ladders were charmed; nor did they seem in the least disturbed by these devastating interruptions. They took it all in the day's journey, as they spun their way to earth from the branches of the oak. It is a bold thing to come down from that peaceful green world into the very middle of a main road on a summer afternoon, but no doubt, like other travellers, they went cheerfully, being ignorant of the dangers about them.

As they came nearer to earth we stood close above them, and the one, with that quickness to seize an opportunity which we admire in all the great adventurers, immediately made himself secure by spinning a second thread from my shoulder. Thence he descended to earth. The other whirled furiously before us, as the wind caught him, swept upwards in a glorious circle, and then descending, came to rest on my finger. He waved his two front legs languidly, and then sank down, as it seemed to me, with the graceful exhaustion of the trained performer. I laid him among the grasses at the road side. The other had already disappeared.

One does not commonly think of the caterpillar as a graceful thing of the air. He is a pest, a furious eater. But when one comes on him

suddenly in the middle of so splendid and perilous a journey one forgives him for some of the many things that he has devoured. He may have a voracious stomach, but he has also his spinneret. When you think of the leaves that he has eaten to the ribs and the oak trees that he has devastated, remember also this silver thread by which he travels through space. No one who can set out on such a journey is to be altogether hated and despised. This adventurer, I thought, must somewhere in literature be celebrated as something more than a mere destroying insect, and I went in search of whoever had written of him worthily. First, in an old natural history book I found, not a piece of prose but at least a picture, the work of an artist whom the caterpillar, poor greedy grub, had moved to feelings of awe and even fear. It was an old-fashioned book, old enough, that is, to be illustrated not with diagrams and plates but with real pictures, and this picture showed the processional caterpillar on the march.

It was night. In orderly ranks the caterpillars descended a fir tree and crossed the ground below. Their leader marched alone. Behind him was a rank of two; behind these were three; behind these again four, and so the ranks went in

ascending scale until they were lost among the branches of the fir tree. They advanced like an army, and the last touch of horror was given to the scene by a dim rabbit in the background, flying in terror beneath a shadowy moon. These processional caterpillars of that old book were very different from their pathetic, yet heroic, descendants on whom M. Fabre made his unkind experiments with the flower pot. These, one could see, would have swept over and devoured any naturalist so presumptuous as to stand across their path. They were the demigods and giants of the early morning of the caterpillar world, for by an imaginative but unscrupulous use of perspective the artist had made them appear to be larger than the rabbit. It was an enchanting picture—but still I had not found either the prose or verse for which I sought.

There is only one caterpillar in Hans Andersen and he has not even a story to himself. He makes no more than a brief appearance in the story of the beetle, as a modest sentimental creature, a foil to the beetle's conceit. "How beautiful the world is," says he, "the sun is so warm and everything so happy! And when I one day fall asleep and die, as they call it, I shall awake as a butterfly." But surely no one who has a

spinneret inside him would ever dream of becoming something else.

And then at last, I found an old pamphlet, very roughly printed, with the date 1659. It had the title "The Caterpillars of this Nation, anatomised in brief discovery of housebreakers, pickpockets, etc. With the life of a penitent Highwayman." Here, thought I, was the caterpillar not unworthily treated. He carries his rope within him. He is the natural associate of the daring criminal and of those also who have made heroic escapes. Casanova, Cellini, Baron Trenck are among the great caterpillars of history. But when I opened the pamphlet I found that the caterpillar, after all, was introduced only on account of his destructive appetite. Housebreakers and pickpockets, said the penitent highwayman (who must either have been a hypocrite or an invention of some pious sentimental journalist of the Commonwealth), are "the catterpillars of this nation which do eat into men's estates and lives."

The search has failed, but I still hope that some day, when I am not looking, I shall find the poet who has sung of this adventurer as he deserves—of him, and his journeys, and his silver rope.

THE VILLAGE AT THE WORLD'S END

THE road to the village at the world's end turns aside from a valley in the south of England just before this valley reaches the sea. It is cut abruptly into the side of the Downs, and rises at once in a little hill, so that nothing of it is to be seen but the first few yards. Nor, though there are scarcely any roads now in all the south of England without their sign-posts, is there any sign at the corner of this road, and for that reason no one would go by it unless he liked the look of the road or because he wondered whither it went.

One follows this road, expecting nothing, yet wondering all the while what there is to find, and then, where the heart of solitude should be, one comes to the village at the world's end.

It is more securely hidden than if it were in the middle of a forest without paths, or among the deep, unseen folds of the mountains, for it is hidden without artifice. It lies in a great bowl of the Downs, open from morning until evening to

the sun; and because it is hidden without artifice it is all the more beautiful to have found it. Moreover of its discovery it can be said (as of few of the great discoveries of life, like falling in love, or learning that some day one must die) that one can remember the exact place at which the discovery was made. There is a place on that road (and you can return to it) at which you knew nothing of this village, and then, before another breath was drawn, had found it all.

At that place you look at it at about the level of its little church tower, with ivy growing all over it and creeping in at the lips of the wooden lattices under its red tiles. It has few houses but many trees, all gathered together, as it seems, for companionship; and so near and so modestly do its roofs lie at your feet that you feel you could almost step across them to the Downs at the other side. These things about it are delightful, but you do not know at first that this is indeed the village at the world's end, though already you can see that the road which you have followed, which dips from your feet into the village and rises beyond it, ends in the turf just below the further rim of the Downs, as if those who had made it knew very well that beyond that ridge was no place to which it could go.

You do not know at first that this is the village at the world's end, because the poets have not prepared your mind to find it as it is. In this village are no magic casements opening on perilous seas; nor enchanted woods "haunted by woman wailing for her demon lover"; nor such things beyond words to tell, as Kilmeny found; nor the frozen houses of Tong Tong Tarrup on the great crag looking over the edge of the world. Yet any one of the poets who have told us of these things might have been very well content, when he came to the world's end, to find such a little English village as this.

After you have gone down into the village and been there for a while you begin to understand, even without speaking to any one of its inhabitants, that belief which is theirs. You begin to understand it as you look up on every side at that unbroken rim of the great bowl of the Downs in which the village lies. It does not tower above it, nor menace it, nor fling at it clouds and twisted shadows and crooked winds, nor play the terrible and grotesque as mountains do to the villages at their feet. But it surrounds it very gently, and closes all the world to it.

There is no clock in the church tower. Of a clock the village has no need. Its inhabitants

measure the morning by the shadow as it climbs and disappears over the eastern rim of their great bowl of the Downs, and they measure the change of the day towards evening as the shadow returns, coming gently as a friend, down the western slope of sunlit grass until it touches their houses. Across this rim, where their only road ends, they watch the day pass. The sea mists roll in to them across it as from another world, and if a tall man were to stand on tiptoe on their church tower he would just fail to look over it.

By day the gold of the sun makes a mist above it, but when the day has burnt out behind it into a few grey ashes of cloud which the night wind blows away, when all the colours have faded from its grass and it is left a dark line, clear and mournful against the sky, that great rim of the Downs has something not to be described except that it is final, satisfying, and complete. It is then that you both understand and share the simple faith of those who live in this village. For while we believe that the world is round and has no end at all, and the ancients believed that it was flat and that its end was the swift encircling stream of Oceanus, their faith is that the world is a great bowl and no man may climb to its rim, but if you stand on tiptoe on the church tower

you can nearly see over it. For those who live in this serene place and see each day pass across their world and go out beyond that dark horizon of the Downs there could be no other faith.

One thing more there is in proof that the men and women of this village do indeed hold this faith, believing that here the world ends and that by their road no travellers will come on their way to other places. And this one thing also makes this village—habitable and familiar as it is—akin to those places which the poets discover in the borderlands between the worlds. Though the poets find them beautiful, containing those things that they have never had and desire, and those things also that once they had in this world and long to find again, yet always there is something that is remote, scarcely human, and that chills the heart. So also is it with this village at the world's end. It has no inn.

WINDOWS

THE war was long since over, but Private Steep still lay in a hospital ward, and when he talked at all he talked of the war. He would tell you that he knew men who had not been able to stand it. For himself he was glad to say that it had not troubled his nerves. If you asked him what he did lying there, he would say that he did not do much. He did not care to read, and though sometimes people would offer to read to him he found it difficult to listen. The sentences were too long. He was very well, he would add, but he felt tired. The war had been rather a tiring job. He liked best to lie and do nothing, and look at the white wall opposite.

It was then that he was moved to the window. "Give a man like that nothing but a wall to look at and he'll see things on it," said the doctor; "he'll see all the things that he ought to forget." But by the window he still lay and looked at nothing, or at whatever else it was that his mind

saw. He was content with nothing. That was his disease.

He had been by the window a week or more when chance brought to that ward a great parcel of old magazines, gathered from the tops of bookshelves and cupboards. They were only ten and fifteen years old, but they seemed more ancient than the Flood, and the patients looked curiously, as into another world, at pictures of forgotten events, at the ascending ages of celebrities whom no one now knew, at cartoons of unremembered controversies.

Private Steep turned them over without interest. He looked at the pictures with a dull eye. He was too tired to puzzle out the jokes. He gave up the attempt. And then, as he pushed them away, he found between a *Punch* and a *Strand Magazine*, a book of coloured pictures called *Mediæval Masters*. They were queer, but that did not trouble him like the queerness of the fashions and the jokes of fifteen years ago. For there was something very firm and clear about them.

It was at their brilliant colours that he looked first, and then he saw with satisfaction that he knew at once what each thing was. He had never seen such chairs and cups, strangely shaped and

carved, but he knew that they were chairs and cups. Nor had he ever seen such women, with their long white fingers and wonderful dresses.

He looked through that book and not until it was finished did he remember to be tired. Two days later he surprised his nurse by being angry because another patient had the book when he wanted it. He had not troubled before to be angry.

He was content at first to look at the brightness of the colours, and at those women who were, in some strange way, both beautiful and comic. Then he began to look into the pictures, at the carving of furniture, and the embroidery of dresses. In one an open book lay on a cushion. He could see the drawings in the book. He began to go round those pictures like a child examining a new room.

It was then that he noticed a picture which seemed to him very odd. It was called "Madonna Enthroned with Angels," but the throne was not such as he had ever imagined, and, most curious of all, in the throne was a window. He looked through the window and saw trees, very tall trees as delicate as feathers; he saw a shore, where a man was running down towards the quaintest of little ships; and far away on an

island was a shadowy blue city, a city that looked as if it had risen straight from the sea.

He turned through the book again and found, what he had not noticed before, that in nearly every one of the pictures was a window. Even those that were not rooms yet had their windows, and none of the windows was empty. Through one he looked up a winding valley to hills as blue as the sea, and through another at a little town. Instead of looking into those pictures he began now to look out of them.

It was the window with the little town that pleased him most. For it was a window in a real room, a room with a tiled floor, and a three-cornered chair, and a carved wooden bench where the mother sat feeding her child. The window itself was very small, with a heavy iron studded frame folded back from it, but through it you saw the whole town—houses, and people walking in the square, and a tall church tower, and behind it a road that crossed the hills. It was all extraordinarily small, and far away, but as clear as a summer's day. He wished that he could have put his head out of that window and seen a little more, but it was wonderful how much one could see.

He had long since lost the feeling that in those

pictures was anything odd. The women remained beautiful, but they no longer seemed comic. It was right that in gardens and in thrones you should find windows looking out on other worlds. Then one day he suddenly realised that he had a window of his own and had never looked through it; and when he came to look through it he found, what was still more strange, that it was not very unlike the little town through the window of the picture. He looked down a slope of chimneys and roofs, and across them to another slope where houses stood, and he could see a tall brick tower with a clock. He could see also one bend of a road, where trams passed. They were very small but as vivid a red as the wonderful dress of the woman in the picture.

It was not as good to look at as the little town. At first he disliked it because it was never for two days the same, and that troubled him. But the more he looked at it the more his interest in it grew. Sometimes in the sunlight it was almost as clear as the town in the picture, but even when the rains drew their grey brush across it, he could see the tower with its clock, and the bend of the road.

At last he began to feel a pleasure in its

changes, and to watch for them—for the coming of the sun, and the shadows, and the rain, that were always making it look different though they left it always the same.

However much he looked he would never see more of the little town, in its perpetual clearness, nor find where the road led, that crossed the hills. But here was a road below him, and one day when he was well he would take the tram along it and find where it went.

The doctor's notes on his case (which were published in a medical journal and were read with interest by other doctors) described the various treatments which led to his recovery. But they did less than justice to the book of *Mediæval Masters*. Indeed they did not mention it at all unless it was included in the phrase "a judicious combination of psycho-therapy and occupation." What they did not say was that through the quaint windows of those pictures he had learnt to look out again on his own world.

THE END

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